Episode #29 - Dr Olga Morton - Empowering Women To Thrive in Menopause (Expert) Transcript

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Podcast Introduction and Mission

Welcome to the Startup Support Surgery podcast, where we light the entrepreneurial spark in medics and healthcare professionals. Join me, Dr. Jo Watkins, GP, business coach and co-founder of The How People, on a journey to discover where your medical know-how meets the business world.

This will help you find some clarity on how to balance work, passions and family so that you can gain more freedom and control over your life but also continue to help people, which is actually why most of us went into medicine to start with.

Embarking on this entrepreneurial adventure is not easy. It is a roller coaster of emotions, but it's hugely rewarding and exciting in the process. Drawing in on my 20 years of blending medicine and business as a GP, I am here to share experiences, insights and lessons.

Expect lively chats, expert interviews and real life stories from medics who have taken their own path. Let's break free from traditional healthcare norms and explore more innovative ways of making a real difference to people's health and wellbeing, along with paving the way for a brighter future for us as healthcare professionals.

Oh, don't miss my free PDF called From Stethoscope to Startup, which is an 11-page guide in the show notes full of practical help and advice. This is your roadmap to kick-starting your journey with us.

Enjoy the Show. I'm delighted to have one of my founding members on the podcast today. Dr. Olga Morton has been practicing medicine in the UK for over 15 years, and her mission is to empower women with effective lifestyle changes so they can thrive through menopause without HRT.

Olga and I met at the BSLM conference in October 2023 when she jumped into working with me when I started the Startup Support Surgery Program.

Olga Mortonu2019s Background and Lifestyle Medicine Journey

She's been working me ever since, and has kept in touch with all of the people that founded the programme with me, as she will tell us on the podcast.

Olga is a busy lady. She's got three teenage boys and lives in Glasgow and works as an NHS GP. In this podcast, we talk about the honest truth behind running a business and the struggles that we can all face.

We talk the great things, the difficult things and things that wish we'd known before we started. Olga talks about importance of community and importance for collaboration and working with other people in your field.

Olga loves sharing her knowledge at her monthly master classes online. She has a regular newsletter and is always appearing as a guest on podcasts and in in-person events.

We'll link up everything that she does in the show notes below. Olga's random fact is that she has got a refurbished whiskey barrel as an ice bath in her house, which is very cool.

I presume it's outside your house. Is it, Olga? It's inside my house? Yes. Amazing. Very suitable for a woman that lives in Scotland as well. Yes, I wanted to go natural and I didn't want to, there's so many whiskey bars, not whiskey, sorry, the cold plunge, different companies sell it.

And I want it to with something authentic, something that I can feel it's sustainable as well. So I came across this guy, he was actually on Gumtree and somebody else recommended him to me and yeah, it was very straightforward.

It's very big. And I'm quite a small person and I was worried that I might get kind of, I wouldn't be able to get out of it. It just kind pushes you back out again.

So it's super easy. And because we live in Scotland, i don't really use the ice because it is pretty cold. Like today it was like 0 degrees in the morning.

Cold enough. Fantastic. I love that. We need to see that on Instagram. Well, thank you so much for joining me, Olga. It's absolutely a huge pleasure to have you here.

Um, we've been working together, uh, for over 18 months. we have been part of each other's lives and I think it's really lovely to be able to kind of reflect on that and tell everybody what you're doing now.

i still use you as a case study when I do my free webinars. I love everything that you do. So let's, why don't you tell us in your own words, I've given a bit of an introduction, but you, tell in us your words who you are, who help and we'll go from there.

Yes, thank you so much, Jo. And it's a pleasure to be here. My name is Olga and I work as a, well, first of all, actually, am a mom of three boys, and am my wife as well and life is busy.

I'm got three teens and pre-teens now. 16, 13 and 10. And anybody who has children probably can relate to it very easily. And then I work as a GP in the NHS.

So I worked at least two or three days a week. I'm a locum at the moment, or the other fancy name is a freelance GP. and I used to be a partner, but I stepped down for personal reasons a few years ago.

When kids were very young and family life was just too busy, it just wasn't fair on my partnership and myself either. And I think at that time I already was learning to recognize, okay, well, something's got to give.

That feeling of the balance will be tipped not in the right way. So I knew that I had to step down for that moment in time. I got into lifestyle medicine because I was seeing my patients with type 2 diabetes, hypertension, chronic illnesses, thinking, gosh, there must be a better way to do that.

And before I became a GP, I was a research scientist. So after my medical degree, did a PhD in autoimmunity. And we studied autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, for example.

So we were trying to find novel drugs to treat those chronic conditions. And it was very interesting. But again, I realized that all these novel drops, although they were effective, they had side effects and And again, even then I was thinking, well, why do we get not immune disease?

You know, the common mantra was there's nothing you can do. It's just genetics is a bit of a bad luck. But even there, I think there must be something else, you know.

There must something that's tipping that immune system to the other side to start suddenly getting, we call it confused when it's recognizing your own body as foreign and trying to attack it.

So coupled with that knowledge, And that curiosity was always there. So then I was seeing all these chronic illnesses and slowly but surely I got into podcasts with, you know, listening to Dr.

Chatterjee and then went on to his one day course. That was 2019 and I knew straight away that this is what I want to do. This is the answer. And then I said the BSLM diploma in lifestyle medicine and have never looked back.

I learned so much because just even let's say nutrition, I mean I had zero knowledge in nutrition and that's coming from somebody who's got a medical degree and then a doctor degree in autoimmunity.

You'd think that there will be at least some knowledge but it was it was very minimal.

Finding a Niche in Menopause Support

And I think for me, telling my patients, well, just go and eat healthily and exercise more, I just knew it wasn't enough because I didn't know what is healthy, what it's healthy eating.

So that diploma gave me the foundations, the foundation then to implement this in my daily practice. Okay. Did you go straight into sort of growing your own thing from then?

So obviously you had this sort You've ignited this interest in stuff I think you've highlighted that we don't learn at medical school. So how did that then pan out?

Did you go straight into your own business? Like, how does that work at the beginning? So yes, I was obviously very passionate after my diploma. And I'm sure people who have done a diploma or the accreditation is called these days, you come out of this with the certificates thinking I am just going to now do this in my daily practice.

You can obviously do that in the NHS. I still do it every single day, even if you've only got 10, 15 minutes. But I thought, well, how can I spend more time with my patients?

And to do it on the side as like a coaching almost in lifestyle medicine, but I had no clue how to go about it. And like most of us, probably I'll say, I thought I'm just going to help everyone, you know, whether it's an autoimmune condition, whether they want to reduce their cholesterol levels.

And that's how I started out initially. I was just grateful for any client or patient who was interested in this. Maybe that is a good way to start. But then from working with you, I realized that you do have to develop your niche.

And I know it's a very scary concept because what I thought, well, if I'm going to say, I am only working with women, and I only work with people who have, let's say PCOS, so they're going be in between the ages of childbearing age, What about the, you know, the man that I wouldn't be able to help with their cholesterol, so you are worried that you'll be missing out, that will be losing out on your clients, which is completely not true.

And once that message hit home, I think I realized wow, everything becomes easier. Your messaging is much more clearer. You're marketing, then you know exactly who you're talking to.

And I think that's why your program is excellent, because you literally go step by step, module by module, where you have to think about who your ideal client is.

I once you had that ideal clients in that picture, in the image, and in your head, I'm sure most of us will have the ideal client in our head if we think long enough, then suddenly everything becomes so much easier.

Yeah, absolutely. And you're so right. This is something that people really struggle with, particularly at the beginning. People can get quite stuck in this point, but I think there are two things, especially for GPs.

One is that we're worried that they're going to miss out on other clients that might be interested. The other thing is we are worried the person we could help is also going miss on the help we can give them.

We're used to helping everyone with everything and everyone knocking on our door. and whoever they are, we can help them. So it's a real shift, isn't it?

And it is great for you to share that from your perspective. Because I remember when I first saw your website, I was thinking, this is, great, you're great.

But who are you helping? It took a little while, didn't there? There was a bit of resistance there to start with, wasn't? You were like, oh, not sure.

Tell us who you help now. Who is that ideal client for Yeah, so you're absolutely right. So I should also mention, I think before I found you, and let's say, you know, 2020, 2021, i was really looking for somebody to help me from that business side, because I knew that I know very little.

I felt like that blind kitten, when kittens are born and they're trying to find their mommy. Like I was like, what do I want? Where do i go? What do do now?

And I think that's another wrong, you know, wrong but like a common thing to do, which is maybe not quite right is everybody's worried about their website, like I need a website.

But before you do the website and again, please don't, I mean you can have a site if you want to, but do not go and spend a lot of money on a web site.

if you don't know who your ideal client is. And that's what I did, unfortunately. Well, you know, it's done now, but it tweaked now. It's changed a lot.

But that was my website. You're absolutely right. it just was like a generalized medicine. I helped a whole list and long list of people I can help, all these conditions, But it was just not good enough.

And so I then, as I was working through and maybe getting a few clients and I slowly realizing then who do I like working with? Who do i relate the most to?

Collaboration, Community, and Working with Others

And by the way, if you're only just starting out, it's okay to have what we call them the beta clients. It's OK to different clients initially, because how would you even know who you want help if haven't had any experience?

And you are absolutely right, SGPs, we are so good at helping everybody. children, elderly, mental health, perinatal health. But you know, you can't do that when you're doing it, when your starting a business.

So that was a very important lesson that I had to learn. And so when I then was trying to find out who is my ideal client to be. Okay, it then happened to me a woman, and I am a women myself.

I'm going through perimenopausal changes and, I was seeing a lot of women who were coming to with symptoms. And of course, as an HHGP, you know, tried my education and the most common one is obviously HRT, but then when they would come back to me and they'd say, well I've tried HRC, I'm on HRRT.

I have tried all different types of HRTs that pill the patch gel and why am I still not better? This is where I felt really stuck because I didn't know the answer because we as GPs, that is it.

You know, you've run out of tools basically. And then when they would be even going back to the specialist, let's say the specialists would suggest a different kind of HRT again.

So again, they will come back me. I then realized, well, hang on a minute, the same lifestyle changes that we're talking about for chronic illnesses are exactly what we need as women going through this transition in life, through midlife.

And it was only natural that I started working with women. And because I was going through that myself, I'm curious, what else can we do to help ourselves?

Because I could see that those poor women were so overworked. They were overwhelmed with stress. There was sandwich between the teenagers, teenage children and their elderly parents.

they were holding on to their career and the stress levels were high. So this is where I felt that lifestyle changes are going to be crucial. Yeah, absolutely.

And that's what you've gone on to do. You've got to support women who are unable to take HRT or who don't want to Take HRC. I know you worked with people with cancer and lots of reasons why they might not be able to and support them with lifestyle, which is just amazing.

One of the things I love about you, Olga, is that right from the off, you have been open to all sorts of collaborative partnerships and events and working with different people.

How important do you think that is in terms of getting started in business. I think it's super important. The other thing is doctors. What's holding us back?

We are so worried about being judged. And I think it also comes from the fact that, you know, we have to go for every step in our career is confirmed by an exam, a certificate, permission, that now I can call myself this, I've got this post-dominance to my name or, and then I, think we are quite self-conscious, which then makes us worried about judged and that also makes I think that competitiveness is there and it makes us worried that what if somebody else is better than me or I don't even, you know.

And it's kind of like a two sides, there's two side to it. We're worried we are not good enough and then we're also worried somebody is also better then us.

So this comparison is happening all the time. Whereas I really think what we need to embrace is collaboration instead of competition. Because let's face it, when you actually team up with somebody, you collaborate with someone, even if that person is in the same field as you, it actually is going to lead to amazingly better results, amazingly bigger and better opportunities.

Yeah. It's so powerful, isn't it? And you're actually, like you say, it's counterintuitive for most medics. I have people saying to me, well, you know, I'm not going to go into the, let's use menopause as an example, because we're talking about it, but, You know I don't want to to the menople space because so-and-so is doing it.

Building an Audience Through Newsletters and Events

And your like, Well, that, Like I say to people, unless you are going invent a completely new piece of machinery that you can then go and get the IP of and nobody can do it they're always going have peoples people working in the same area as you, but you bring a totally unique set of skills, personality, experience to the table.

And the most powerful you think you can do is go out there and find all those other people that are also helping people in your space, work with them, talk to them.

Share a piece of advice. So for your collaborative menopause events, three, four menoppause specialists, all with different interests and experience, the power that that brings to a wider audience, you know, working in the overlapping audience that you guys will have is huge.

So yeah, that's brilliant. The other thing I love about you, Olga, love lots of things about Olga is that, you've taken the whole build your list and write a newsletter regularly thing that I bleat on about.

And you are one of the best newsletter pupils for sure, aren't you? Tell us about that. Is it a pain or do you enjoy it or how does it work for you. Thank you so much, Joe.

I mean, I do enjoy it. That's another thing I learned from you. You know, and I'm not big on Facebook at all. So I didn't have a Facebook page until I think I had a really like the very practical one.

If I have to know where my kids football game is that weekend or the rugby pitch. And then when I started working with you okay I realized I really have to set up a Facebook business page or an Instagram or something so that's

the other thing I struggled with initially.

But the one thing that you taught us that social media, although it could be very helpful, is very volatile. So one minute you might have 10,000 followers on Instagram, next minute that might be just suddenly gone in a puff.

You need to have the newsletter. And so that was a good message that I learned from you. I started literally with my first in-person event was in I think 2022 maybe or 2021. I maybe had about 15 people at that in person event and it was a local tennis club that I've just spoken to and I said would you mind if I just came in and talked to you your members of this tennis Club about this you know and they said absolutely so it's totally free and so I had eight subscribers from that event so that was the beginning of my newsletter And initially it was very generic, you know, like something about nutrition, something like exercise.

But then, obviously, as I started working with women, it's very clear that it is menopause. It was lifestyle changes and menoppause, so it much more specific now.

It's slowly grown to over 300 subscribers now. Again, it's not big. Obviously, there's lots of room for improvement, but this is a way of me to communicate with my audience.

I must proudly say my open rate is about 60% and it is quite steady, which I didn't know, apparently it was really good. And I do get a regular reply saying, hey, Olga, that was such a good email.

Thank you so much for this message. And they would always comment saying I already do that. But what about this? And that would make maybe a few suggestions.

So it's so heartwarming to get those messages because let's face it, I mean if you're doing a newsletter sometimes it feels like it just goes into a stratosphere and you think I've spent all this time I'm not even sure who is reading it but then you get that one or two messages back and think yes people are reading so it makes a difference and so I think that's really important.

I thing the message there is if get a news letter from somebody and then read it and it actually sinks in, just hit reply and say, thanks so much. That really helps because it means the world.

And what Olga is describing is, is that feeling that nobody's listening, whether it's social media or newsletter. So that means that world to small business owners just to tell them.

Thank you for sharing that, Olga. Now, right at the beginning, you said you're a mum, You've got three boys, busy life. We all know what that looks like.

Increasingly, I'm working predominantly with women, with children, and with families, trying to juggle everything. It's hard, right? Let's talk about those, you know, how do you sort of manage the juggle?

I mean, I guess what have been the struggles? We've touched on some of the good things, but what are the difficulties about running your own business?

Oh, it's tough. Yes, I think the first thing I need to know, and you said that so many times, is that it is a marathon, not a sprint. So prepare yourself for a long haul.

It's a very long journey and it will be an up and down journey. One day you will feel so motivated and things are going great and the next days or something happens and suddenly you feel like, why am I even doing this?

Because it's taking toll on yourself and your family. But then in those moments you ask yourself, I certainly do, well why are you doing You know, you can stop this right now.

I mean, go back to your NHS job and that's so much straightforward, more straightforward and easier. But then you ask yourself that core question, why does it matter to you?

Why are you doing this? I'm doing it because I know that those women that I am trying to help will benefit from my help and they need my health.

Balancing Business, NHS Work, and Family Life

Yes, they might go to, there's lots of information on Instagram. As you said, so many specialists and menopause these days. maybe my approach is slightly different.

Maybe they will relate to me more because I have free kids, because, I don't know, the way I approach things. And that's the other thing. Don't worry that there's other specialists in your field.

There always are going to be. I mean, how many business coaches are out there in the world, but yet you connect with certain ones who then resonate with you, who you can relate too.

And so, and doing it as a woman, as woman who also runs a household, who has children, whose children are going through, I don't know, hires or GCSEs.

I mean, it's extremely tough. But then I think you just learn to find those, love your expression, the pockets of time. Because when you're sitting on that, at that football pitch or waiting for that tennis match to finish, this is when WhatsApp messaging.

This is when you go through emails. You just have to find the time, but also be kind to yourself. You know, you can't expect miracles. You can expect suddenly because you compare yourself to others and you think, wow, how come such and such already has done this and I'm only at that stage.

So only compare your self to yourself a month ago, three months ago a year ago. Just even going back to this newsletter, I thought I've been doing this news letter for ages and how can I only go 300 followers.

And then I went back to my newsletter that I posted a year ago. Oh my God, just even the difference, like how it had evolved. Like it's so much better now, the vision, you know, and the way it looks, even in the visuals.

And that just reminded me, oh wow, okay, well you've actually made progress. Yes, it was a slow progress because you've also got your NHS job because, you need to bring in a certain amount of income while you're building this business.

You also need, to look after your kids. And so that's okay. It will be slower, but I'm fine with that. Yeah. Actually in podcast episode number 26, I talk about exactly what you talked about, the need for time.

You know, time, money, sense of place, and the people around you. If you are a retiree who is wanting to build a business on the side and you've got no children, you're going to have a lot more time than somebody like you with a three day a week job, three kids.

And that's the reality. You can't change that reality, we don't want to change it. The reason we're doing this is to give us a degree, often to a flexibility around our lives.

So to actually, you know, not make that, I know it's hard and I'm guilty sometimes of not getting those boundaries in place, but we can't rush it. It's just going to take time unless you've got hours and hours to put into it, And actually, I would argue that even if you've got five hours, five days a week, you can get a lot done in one hour a day, four times a, week and that whole like getting up early, finding pockets of time, doing the work that needs to be done, prioritizing, not procrastinating.

So yeah, this is real life. It's not all roses and unicorns, is it? But you are loving what you're doing and finding that balance now by the sounds of things.

Yes, because, I mean, you've got that business on the side. First of all, I mean, you're not doing it to make money,

yeah? You're doing to it make a difference.

And so, yes, it will be lovely if it's going to replace your existing income, but that will take time. So on average it takes about eight to 11 years to build a good solid business if you are going do it full-time.

But we know that we're no doing full time, so you need to remember that as well. Then again, remember your why. Because if, let's say, if I was just doing my, regular NHS work.

I just knew that I wouldn't feel fulfilled. That I had more to give to the world and that is why I'm doing it. And if it's going to grow, if its going get into something bigger, absolutely I would love that.

But at the same time I know my own limitations at that moment and I am okay with that Yeah, brilliant. I think that's really, really important thing to say, Olga.

You know, you're not doing it for the money, You're doing to make a difference. And the vast majority of people that I work with within this program are exactly the same.

This is a very different type of business that you are building compared to some of the sort of innovation, health tech, fast growth, a fast exit businesses which are popping up everywhere.

There's a lot of noise around that and noise, around the requirements for big amounts of money to get a project off the ground. We're not talking about that.

we're talking, about having a passion and interest an area of medicine that you're particularly, you know, want to tell your story and be an authority in that area and building something that fits with family life, with work, and with everything else that's going along.

And that takes time and is one step at a time. One client at at time, one podcast at the time one newsletter at And so that's really, really helpful for you to have highlighted.

Thank you very much.

Advice for New Lifestyle Medicine Entrepreneurs

So I guess, I mean, there's loads of bits of advice there, but before we wrap it up, are there any sort of specific advice that, is there specific advise you'd give to somebody maybe coming towards the end of their BSLM diploma, you know, thinking about their next steps full of that enthusiasm that happens when people finish.

You know, is there anything that you would say, any particular advice that would give somebody? Yes, I would first of all, well done if you're getting to the end of your accreditation.

It's again, it's a lot of work. I'm fully aware of that and done it myself. And it again doing it, you know between looking after your kids and your day job.

If you are coming out of diploma, if want to start you don't know where to, how to do it. Find your tribe. You need to be in a container where you do have like-minded health professionals who are trying to do the same, who aren't at the stage as you are.

And that's why I think Joe's program is excellent for that, because I did not have that when I came out of the BSLM diploma. I was actively searching for somebody like Joe, but I just think that Joe didn't exist.

Or maybe you were also budding, you know. in your kind of personal growth. And so finally, when I found your program, it was amazing because the personal and growth we've had and to meet and we were such a lovely group as well of the founders of that program where we are in the same boat.

You know, like we did not know how to make a QR code. I was just telling Joe how I suddenly feel like I'm a big pro in this. A year ago, I 18 months ago, I had no idea.

And it's these simple things, like the techie things are holding us back and yet we know so much. about the stuff in our field. But these techie things will paralyse you because it makes you feel as if like, well, I don't know how to, press this button, which is actually so silly.

Or how do you start a newsletter? I know those are not maybe straightforward things, but those all are figure outable things. But being in that container, being a group of these wonderful health professionals that we were, it was just amazing.

And we had such a good time because we're growing together, we are developing new skills. We were learning how to run a webinar and how run the Zoom chat and all these things.

I know it sounds again so simple, maybe for some, but for us it's a big deal. And look at us, you know, the girls that I'm, ladies I am in touch with now, who are going to finish this program, we are still in-touch and we're still doing our own things, all at different speed, and and were loving it.

And so for that, I would say thank you, Jo, And I m sure the future cohorts will probably have exactly the same wonderful experience. Oh, what a lovely thing.

And I haven't paid you or even asked you to say anything like that. So that's really lovely of you. I think, you know, we were all on a journey together and I'm like a big mother hen when I see any of your doing anything.

So I feel very honored to have been part of your journey and I look forward to everything that you do. You are very, very beautifully set up in front of you QR code that I will be sharing in the show notes below along with your website and everything else.

So you've got an amazing ebook. And one of the things again, another thing that love about Olga is that, I use her constantly in my normal practice.

Closing Thoughts and Call to Action

Probably once a clinic I would say that somebody to your ebook, because it is packed full of advice. So anybody who is menopausal, who's looking for lifestyle advice, maybe even just to run alongside their HRT, it's absolutely brilliant.

I'll put that in the link below as well, and we'll all keep an eye on what you're up to. But thank you so much for your time, Olga, thank for joining me today.

Thank you, It was a pleasure. Transitioning from medicine to business is not easy. It's about adapting our skills while embracing the unknowns of entrepreneurship.

it can be nerve wracking, but remember you are not alone on this journey. Please feel free to reach out to me via direct message on LinkedIn or Instagram, or just shoot me an email at joe at bendylegs.com for support.

And don't forget to grab the free PDF from the show notes from Slethoscope to Startup, which is your go-to guide and resource for diving into entrepreneurship.

Many thanks for tuning in. I will see you next time. Thanks for spending your precious time with me. This has been a Monkey Pants Productions Podcast.