Episode #36 - Dr Natasha Collins - Balancing A Clinical Life With Helping Women Make Sustainable... 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. Dr. Natasha Collins is an NHS GP partner based in Usk in South Wales. She works six sessions a week as a GP and has the privilege of also serving as the chair of Gwent Local Medical Committee and represents GPs across the region.

She also sits on the GPC Wales Committee, and wants to help shape the future of general practice across country. Alongside her NHS work, Natasha is a qualified health coach, she's done the BSLM Diploma and she is qualified nutritionalist, passionate about helping individuals create lasting transformation in their health and wellbeing.

Dr. Natasha Collins' Background and Clinical Work

In this really honest, really organic discussion, Natasha talks about being a wife and proud mum to her busy children and demonstrates the fact that she understands firsthand the challenges of balancing a demanding clinical professional life, business and family life.

And she brings a bit of realism and compassion to everything that does. So Natasha is joining us today and her random fact is that she absolutely hates flying and she has is yet to step on a plane on her own.

But by the time this podcast goes out, you will have flown on your own, how does that feel? Oh, I'm terrified, but I've got to do it. I'll go into the UK LMC conference next week in Glasgow.

So it's only a very short flight. Yeah, so I have to. Can't have my husband holding my hand for me, can I? Well, thank you very, very much for joining us today.

I'm really excited to speak to you. We've been working together for the last nearly a year now. And I would just love you to tell us a little bit about your journey.

You're a very busy GP. you've got management positions and lots of other stuff going on. Your partner and you're able to fit all of this around three kids.

and running your own business now. So can we get into maybe a little bit around, you know, how this sort of came about, what you're doing now and how it's all sort evolved.

Can you tell us a bit about that to start with? Yeah, no problem. You're completely right. I'm a GP working six sessions in my practice. And I am also a health coach and a qualified nutritionist.

At the moment I help busy, overwhelmed women especially those who feel as if they've tried absolutely everything to basically lose weight for the last time.

And I do this by working with them in a highly personalized and natural way, helping them to make sustainable changes that fit in with their really busy lives.

Then that allows them transform and to thrive, but to do it without those restrictive diets or unrealistic exercise routines. Amazing. And how did you get into this?

How has that process happened? You've been in general practice. Talk to us a little. I know you've had a bit of a journey out and COVID was a big of an issue for you as a, I think, single-handed practice, do you want to tell us about how this all sort of happened.

Yeah, that's completely right. So I'd always wanted to be a GP. For me, it was a non-negotiable. Every project that I could do in medical school, I did it about general practice and I won the GP prize in finals at medical schools.

I was absolutely destined to a be GP and love being a GPs and have always loved it. Back in 2020, i found myself as a single-handed partner.

From GP Practice to Lifestyle Medicine

busy practice in Newport, had a great team, salary GPs, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and then of course COVID hit and it had lot of effect on how we practice, it has a lot effect of the staff and one by one and due to different family circumstances we lost salary GPs and at that time, believe it or not with what's going on now, we couldn't recruit.

There were no Gps looking for jobs and we really couldn' find locums either. So got to March 2022 and it was just really becoming unsustainable in being able to staff the practice essentially and I decided to hand back my GP contract which immediately left mass lifted a massive weight off my shoulders.

Um, and with regards to kind of the, the lifestyle medicine thing, I got into that pretty early in my general practice career, always been interested in nutrition, health.

I've always, been really sporty throughout my entire life and found the BSLM probably back in 2020, 2021. And I, attended their conference online during COVID.

then face-to-face in 2022 so started the work for revising for the diploma and certification and then when I handed my contract back at that time then I was really disillusioned with general practice or the firefighting the 10-minute appointments not being able able to get the time that you need with patients to really make lasting change and the patients will come and say, I really want to lose weight.

I don't know what to do. And you just feel really inadequate as a GP when you can't spend that time with them to unpick, to make genuine suggestions and then to follow it through.

Because we know that if you give patients the information, very, few of them will take it up and follow through So then, when I left the practice, myself, I wasn't doing that great, although nobody would have ever known.

I put on weight, and I was not eating well, exercising, not sleeping well. And I thought, something's now got to change. You've removed all this stress from work.

Come on, you need to sort yourself out. Then it was like, well where do you start? I, as a GP who had a massive interest in lifestyle medicine, did not know where to turn to try and lose weight.

And so I was like, well, I've got to do something. From previously trying to lose way after babies and things, you just know that you can't massively restrict your calories for a long period of time and it's not sustainable.

So did a bit of Googling and found health coaching. and read about health coaching and was like, yes, this is what I need to do. So I signed up for a 12 to 18 month course.

It was pretty self-paced with face-to-face stuff, online stuff and assessments and things, and did that around the locum sessions. I created that time to the course and then in January, 2024 then, I qualified with that course and then was like, okay, where do I start?

What do we do? How do you run a business? And yeah, basically after that spent four or five months, if I'm really honest on my days off and evenings, Basically trying to do a logo, trying come up with a name, Trying to a website.

and we call it titting about on Canva, but it literally, I didn't get anywhere. I enjoyed myself. Don't me wrong. It was good relaxation, it was not making any progress at all with regards to developing a business and moving into what I thought I wanted to do in terms of moving in to that lifestyle medicine, health coaching clinic approach.

Hmm. I think the titting about on Canva, we've got to give that to Ruth, haven't we? Ruth is another member of the Suss community who loves tittering about.

She's good at it as well, yeah. But it's the way that it can suck literally hours and hours, and days and day of your life. And Canver is an amazing tool.

is a very good example of how a lot of us spend our time when we first go into business, and I'd love to come back to that. But what you're describing is this real adventure from being passionate.

I love the fact that you are so passionate about doing general practice at medical school. And I think that's so refreshing to talk to somebody that loves what they do.

You can see why you were involved in the LMC and everything that do, like it's obviously a huge part of your life and you haven't turned your back on that, what augmented that and brought something alongside it.

And this journey from the BSLM through to health coaching, adding nutrition in there. You've done a lot of courses, you've got a lots of qualifications and I see this over and over again with medics that I say they're like, right, okay, what I need to do is qualifying this and qualifying that.

Sort of looking at that now with the eyes of somebody that's now running their own business and has built a thing, how much of that do you think is sort of proving something to yourself?

How much of that is really important knowledge? Would you do anything differently around that? Talk to me a bit about that.

Building a Business and Learning the Hard Way

Yeah, so my very, very first course I ever did was Ron and Chatterjee's prescribing lifestyle medicine online. And that was brilliant for me because it was just so practically based, So case-based.

and I did that whilst I was still at my previous practice. With regards to the health coaching, at the time I knew nothing about health coach in, And the course was fantastic.

It was expensive. it taught me a lot about the coaching process. And now as you move forward and looking back now, there were probably other things that I could have done much quicker potentially in terms of coaching.

But I think what that course enabled me to do was to really hone the practical element. because there was a lot of volunteer work with it. And from that volunteer, work when I finished, I actually ended up retaining two of my volunteers as paying clients right from the get-go.

I think that that's really important because at that point I then knew that I had an idea and I was providing a product that was useful and was really helpful.

And it was almost like an experiment to see what worked. So I think that that really good. I did the nutritional qualification when I felt inadequate after not getting progress with the Canva and the website and things.

What can I do that will be useful for my business? Clearly this is not working, so let me get more knowledge. And the nutritional course, again, was really, really good and it gave me different approaches.

So the health coaching course gives you one approach with regards to how to lose weight, but it might not work for everybody. Everybody's so individual and what I I see what works for people and fits into their lives and that's not going to be the same for everybody.

So it was definitely useful. And then it definitely helped me with the perimenopausal and menopause side of things, because a lot of the women that I'm helping are approaching that period in their life.

I felt that, I didn't have the knowledge around that of time. For that point of view, it's been useful, I don't think now I need to do any more courses, I think.

Right. And you heard it here first, you don t need do anymore courses. She said it out loud. I did. What you've said about the health coaching is something that I talk to people about, whether they're doing the Health Coaching course or whether their doing one of Tom Dillon's coaching courses or wether they are doing a different type of coaching.

qualification, of which there are many out there, so please do your due diligence. When you are doing your practice hours, I think it's an amazing opportunity to actually take that step back and think, who are the kind of people that I want to help long term?

What am I interested in? And actually going out and just finding those people So you can practice, practice practice. Cause what you're saying really is at the end of that coaching diploma with all of those volunteer hours that you've got under your belt, you actually created a product while you were at it and you had practice at delivering that.

So I would really recommend that to anybody that's going through the coaching iterations. What you then did was go and did your titting about on Canva and the website, which we're going to come to in a minute.

And you recognize something wasn't working and I suspect then you didn't think to yourself, I'll tell you what it is, it's about marketing and about building a business and that learning, what is is I need to be better qualified in something.

Would that be fair to say? Absolutely. And in hindsight, i had no idea about business. There was business elements in the course, but I think being me, the scientific academic person that I am, I focus much, much more on being good at the job rather than what was trying to be set up in the background.

Yeah. And this is something I hear repeatedly. If you go back to podcast number four or five with Nerys Freighter, she talks about this as well. There's actually just been a listening to a podcast today that I did with Rachel Morris.

Essentially, whatever your product is, whether you've bought a new hairbrush, whether you've created a new type of hairbrush, whether a service-based product, a bricks and mortar product.

It doesn't matter what it is that you have got. What you need to concentrate on is how you market that and how to

take that into the public domain and tell people what you got in such a way that they understand they have a need for it.

And it's not about sleazy car salesman tactics, it about really identifying the person that needs your help and giving them information about it that makes them go, oh yeah, this is a no-brainer.

This is exactly what I'm looking for. And that's what marketing is, isn't it? So somebody said, it's not ER, It's PR. Like people, you know, medics want to have the best scientific backing and the information and be the better at whatever they do.

You generally are that already. So what you've got to work on is your PR, your marketing, getting out there, talking to people doing uncomfortable things, networking, building relationships.

posting on social media, writing newsletters, going on podcasts. And that's what freaks people out, isn't it? Or did you wake up one morning thinking, I've got this.

I know exactly what I'm doing. No, and I think even now I still haven't got 85% of what you've just said sorted. That is now the next step. regular paying clients coming through who basically are all friends of friends or recommendations from that inner circle that you talk about and that's been so important because again they've done ever so well and then you see once they've done well, they then go and tell people about you and they go, look what this lady did for me.

Look how she's helped me and then you get another, oh, can you give so and so a ring? She really wants to talk to you. And, and that's really lovely as well.

But I think probably the next step maybe is, is to think about how to help more people because I know I've got a really good service and a very good product.

Um, I want everybody to experience that really. Fabulous. but you're a GP, you are a partner, You've got other commitments, three busy children, very sporty that you driving around everywhere.

Finding Support, Branding, and Community

You are building a life, a business around your life. So this term life first business, it's not a lifestyle, this lifestyle business versus growth business.

I get that, but actually this isn't about a lifetime. This is about fitting something into your that works for you. And missing out this period of time of trial and error, of friends of, friends would be a massive mistake to go from like creating a course.

And I say to people, don't sit in your room and create something and get out and sell it. Get out in front of people. Help somebody have that case study of one or two that you've taken from where they are now to where want to be.

Talk to them, get testimonials, you know, write it all up. Have that method that I've actually worked through with somebody and then go out. and think about how you're gonna scale this around your other commitments.

So I think you are doing things exactly as you want to and in exactly the right way. And when you decide to scale needs to be kind of brought into that as well around you kids, because actually sometimes people get to this point and they're like, do you know what, it isn't the time for me to go out and throw lots of money at Facebook ads or be traveling around the country doing talks You've got to make it work for you, haven't you?

How difficult have you found that, first of all, I guess, with the kids particularly? With the kids, I mean, had that monumental shift when I left the practice.

And, you know, at that point I was working ridiculous hours and I made the decision that once I stopped doing that I

would never go back to that. So the kid, they come first and they have to, and that's the right thing.

You know previously work was all encompassing. I didn't do anything else. that present mum that I dreamed I wanted to be. And it was really heart-wrenching.

So actually, since I've locumbed and since now moved into a new partnership, doing less sessions than I was previously, that's freed up the time. I have two days at home every single week.

But essentially, for those two and two on the weekend, I can manage Um, my children's commitments, I can manage my LMC meetings and the admin, um, the health coaching and I.

Put clients in where they fit. And that's one benefit of having that flexibility. I was, uh, it might sound mental to some people, but one client wanted appointments that have passed five on a Wednesday morning because that fitted in around her life and she really wanted to make changes.

That's okay. That's my day off from practice. I can get up at half five to do something that I absolutely love doing. It doesn't feel like a job. So yeah, with regards to the kids, they come first now and I manage everything else around them.

Wonderful. Let's go to where I really can't remember where we met or where you first sort of came into to find out, but I'm assuming during this time of sitting around on Canva and fiddling with your own website, you identified that there was an issue that you needed a solution for.

So how did that come about and how have you found that process of sort of going through the program and the support and that community? If you, how has that helped you?

Cause I think there's a lot of people out there, maybe in your position who have done BSLM, may be done some coaching, who were trying to do it on their own.

And sometimes I struggle to explain to people the benefits of having the support. So, you know, how have you found that process? Oh, well, it's been life-changing for me, literally.

I first came across you, and you were a little bit active in the Wales Lifestyle Medicine WhatsApp group. Then you are on a lifestyle medicine startup day.

And that was back, I looked last night and that back in June, 2023. So that's probably, the very first time I heard you speak. And I hadn't gone there specifically for you, because Nerys Freighter was talking on that day and she was doing what I thought I wanted to do at the time.

I went to the day, and then following that I started following you on Facebook. And after that then started to attend some of your, you know, the free sessions you were doing that were about an hour long and they were periodically.

And then I don't really, I really know then what happened between then me getting to join you, but I saw you had an offer out, which was basically your BSLM offer for last September.

and the hook that got me, was you'd said that there would be help with branding and logo on websites and that's what got me to get in contact with you because at the time.

That's what I thought I needed and that's why I'd been struggling with. So that when I arranged the call with you and yeah, that call was life changing.

And so I said, hi Joe, got a business, I've got name. I know what my colors are. You know, just really struggling and you just went, nah. No, no, so told you my name of my business and just you went no.

And I was like, she knows everything. She's so clever and she's really successful. So yeah, literally, that's why I

joined the community. And so I started working through the online modules, which were refreshing, straight talking, common sense.

The one thing you said to me is like don't you dare skip through to the website bit. Start at module one, start at your niche. I Iwas on the way with my niche, it honed it, it tweaked it and you were like, trust the process.

And I got through to the modules, attended the, you know, the six o'clock morning live sessions and got to website bit and he went, I know somebody who can help you.

Yeah, she did. We got the branding, we got website and you know, I might be a bit biased but I think my website is beautiful.

Balancing Family, Clients, and Growth

It's just lovely and it's sitting there and its waiting for people to find me which is not necessarily the way of promoting the business but that's what needs to come next, i think.

Absolutely. Yeah. And you've got the groundwork there. You've the beautiful website, and we're going to come back to that and where that came from. Now the next bit is getting out there and telling people.

So it's this whole getting clear on what you want, working out how to launch something messily, which you have done, then getting it out and growing your brand and your business, where you are now.

I love that story. It's always slightly horrified because I can never quite remember what I've said. Well, I'm so sorry if you came with all of your tweaking Canva and I told you to put it all in the virtual bin.

That was mean of me, wasn't it? Well, I'm a very straight talking person. And that's what my patients and my clients always say about me. So I do appreciate the same back.

I was like, right, i've made the commitment. i'm just going to do what Joe says. Guess what? Joe was right. The community though is fantastic. You know, it's so refreshing to be in that space with like-minded people who've got the same vision that you have.

They've Got the Same dreams. they're working through at their own pace. So you've, you know you got that support. Everybody's really friendly. And so that's absolutely great.

I've had opportunities to, I have written an article for somebody's booklet that they were sending out to their clients about nutrition. So, you know, that was nice being asked to do that.

Yeah, it's just been brilliant. And I love it. I'm never going to leave, sorry. Well, I loved you and everybody else in it and I think you're exactly right.

like-minded people who understand, who are wanting to help each other. We're all about collaboration. There's no competition. there's lots of people in different niches, in similar nichers, and there is that supportive network of other medics and healthcare professionals from all over the country.

And we've got Sundus in Singapore. you know, real life stuff that's going on and that people are doing around really good clinical positions, big families, caring roles, all of the other stuff.

So thank you so much for sharing so honestly. And I think what you've shown me actually is that you're a very good example of somebody who, you talked about that hook.

I wasn't sure what are you gonna say, but at the time, what he wanted was a logo and a website. And so that language around what I offered answered your need, which was that you wanted a logo and a website.

But what you actually got was what needed, confidence, clarity, community, et cetera. So there's a saying which is give them what they want and tell them.

What they need. who is a wonderful human that I work with out in Canada. She's incredibly creative, she's brilliant at building websites on Squarespace, She is very reasonable.

she goes above and beyond and she will only work people that i work so we work very closely together. And I think that's something that I probably need to highlight more.

So thank you for sharing that. Tell me about some of the struggles about running a business around kids and family, particularly, and then some the great things.

I the not so good thing, for me, is frustration. that I haven't got the amount of time that want to dedicate to this because I know how great it could be even greater than it is now.

And it's that time factor. You used it in one of your emails the other day, you know, progress, not perfection. That's a phrase I use all the time with my clients.

I have to be comfortable with that because obviously I do my practice work, ferry the kids here, there and everywhere, sit on the side of a cricket pitch three days of the week most of time.

So that's the frustration is that I want to do more and I'm having to rein myself in, in order to maintain the boundaries of everything else. You know, if I won the EuroMillions tomorrow, then life would look very different.

And I am sure that, I would fulfill my dreams with regards to this. It's sitting there, it's slowly growing. I've got regular clients coming in. And I can't have too many clients because I haven't got that much time.

But also I'm not the type of person that says, oh, well, I only got five clients. So I am going to charge you X thousands of pounds because that's not why I doing this.

That's why doing to help people who really feel that they've really got nowhere else to turn with this So that is the biggest frustration basically. Well, let's just talk about the frustration before we go on to the good things.

I think you've highlighted a couple of things there. One is sometimes people get real comparisonitis. OK, particularly I've found as much as I adore my medical group, there's a little bit of kind of, you know, can be a bit a frustration around some people who don't maybe don' have children and not working full time, have a lot more time to invest in their business than those people that have got a four day a week.

GP partnership, three children that play county sport. Inevitably, you're not going to have as much time as somebody that doesn't. And that can be frustration because the progress you make when you have more time with business, generally there's a correlation.

You can spend even more times sitting about on Canva, but you can even spend more wasting time. Sometimes if I have a whole day, I can do very little, But if have one hour, then I absolutely nail it.

there is this sort of, you know, comparison that happens and you look at, so it influences on, on social media, or on Instagram, all these beautiful glossy business coaches telling you how easy it is to earn 10 grand a month by working four hours a week.

And you think, well, how is even possible? So be careful with what you're comparing to, okay? And what Natasha's talking about is just this this working your life around your business.

And it's interesting you say about the Euromillions because would it change things? It would, but you would not be outsourcing your children and getting someone else to sit on the sidelines.

You'd be doing all of that yourself. But what it would probably alter is the way that you practice medicine and the impact that would be able to have would huge.

Advice for Medics Starting a Business

We've got to remember that we don't want to outsource our kids. You know, we want to be with them. They're with us for like a blink of an eye, really.

So being distracted constantly by businesses is difficult. We have to rein that in. Frustration is a great issue. What about the good things? And then we'll come to the advice.

Well, the the things are that I get to do something that i really, love. and I get to see the transformation that happens to my clients. And the satisfaction that comes from that is huge and it just validates that you are doing the right thing and this works and just carry on because we've got to do something differently in medicine.

We tend to practice very reactively There is a shift coming with regards to people talking much, much more about preventative medicine. You know, it's obvious really, isn't it?

Let's try and stop people getting poorly in the first place, but it has taken a long time to come. I've been one of those frustrated bystanders since the early 2000s thinking, why are we not stopping people from getting diabetes?

Come on, you know things like this. So that's the really great thing is that the absolute joy on people's faces, the tone in their WhatsApp messages, which say, oh, I did this today.

I've gone to a gym. These are all little, little wins that are huge for your clients. And you do live their journey with them. and I absolutely love that.

Wonderful. Okay, so you've got three tips to give somebody else that's sitting maybe in your position as you were five years ago, two years ago, whatever that looks like, what would you recommend to somebody early on in their entrepreneurial journey or early in the business or project?

Three bits of advice to leave us with before we say goodbye. So the first one absolutely is, unless you have those skills, do not try and do your own logo, branding and website.

outsource it, find somebody who gets you and understands you, and is going to make you an amazing product. That's probably my first piece of advice. My second piece of advice is progress, not perfection.

That's the one, you know, be comfortable with what you can do with regards to your other commitments. Don't burn yourself out. don't sacrifice your sleep and your wellbeing and things like that because if you've got the backing of a really, really good product, then it will come when it organically comes.

And then the third bit of advice is one of Joe's, I'm afraid, but it's like, stop doing so many courses, you know, and do the courses for the right reasons.

You know look at what the course is going to give you and how it is gonna change your practice and what you do. Don't do it because you want to make yourself feel better, because, You've already got all of those skills because You do every single day basically.

Yeah, brilliant. So don't, you know, look at what it's gonna give you, isn't it? Look at, what is going to give, is it gonna add, and what are you gonna do with it afterwards?

So if you are gonna to do a coaching qualification, What is your plan? Because it is very difficult to fit this stuff into your NHS role, as we know. Even having a five minute conversation with a pre-diabetic about the best changes is difficult.

We're just signposting. So how are we gonna use this course in your personal or professional life moving forward? Fantastic bits of advice. Absolutely brilliant talking to you.

I love spending time with you virtually and we're going to meet up in person soon. Just really proud to see you fly and thank you for all you've said today.

Oh, thank so much for inviting me. It's been amazing. Thank you! I hope this episode has sparked some new ideas or challenged your thinking. 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 stethoscope 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.