Episode #38 - Fiona McHardy - Why Niching Down Works – Lessons from a GP Yogi 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 be able to interview one of my clients on the podcast today. Fiona Riccardi is a GP trainer, a yoga teacher and life coach with a passion for helping people refine balance, joy and find a little breathing space in their busy lives.

As a partner and appraiser, she sees firsthand how stress and overwhelm can really take their toll. And she loves blending modern medicine with holistic practices to support both her patients and her fellow healthcare professionals.

Fiona's Background and Yoga Journey

Beyond the consulting room, She brings wellbeing to life through yoga and retreats. on the beach, in-person sessions in a beautiful barn. And she does all sorts of nourishing, amazing things with the people that she works with.

She really believes in the power of movement, breath and reflection. When she's not wearing one of those many hats, she is also a busy mum of three, navigating the beautiful family chaos that we all do, trying to squeeze in as much time for the things that he loves.

Walking, cycling and finding great spots with great food. Fiona's random fact for today is actually one of my favourites so far. Fiona is a qualified tap dancing teacher.

Is that seriously true? That is seriously truth, truth or lie. It is the truth. The truth honestly. You're an active qualified tap dancing teacher. I'm an inactive, qualified, tap-dancing teacher!

That is brilliant! I am sure it comes in handy on your retreat sometimes. Yes, if we feel like a little tap rather than a flow, we can tap. Brilliant!

Well, I want you to take us right back to the beginning, Fiona. You are a GP, you now do a lot of yoga, run retreats,

do all sorts of things in the health and wellbeing space.

Tell me a bit about your journey to where we are now. So yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? It's a long and winding journey. I don't want to witter on too long, but I guess about 10 years ago I hit a really stressful period in my life.

We moved back to North Yorkshire. Um, I moved jobs, so it was all good stuff, But I was just hit by like quite a wave of anxiety that never took any time off but I probably should but like classic medic just kept on going going to work like literally felt like I was hanging on anyway during that like i've always been active but during the time I found yoga or yoga people would say yoga found me and I started practicing yoga and i just found that in that time of constant anxiety, I just found a little bit of peace and calm.

So for a few minutes in my day, and I was like, why does it work? Why does putting my body in the shape of a downward facing dog, like in an A shape, Why, does that make me feel better?

I run, walk, do all of the things that we tell people to do, but why yoga? And for awhile, it didn't matter why, because it's working, so I'm going to keep doing it.

But that, that why stayed with me. And a couple of years ago, I traveled to Bali and did my yoga teacher training. Not because I wanted to teach, because i wanted understand some of the Eastern philosophies and Eastern ways of thinking about the body and the mind.

And from there I was like, oh my goodness, I need to teach. I felt like I wanted to like give something back actually. Amazing. And you are still a GP as well, is that right?

Yeah, so I still like being a G. P. like the rest of us. There's a lot of it that we shouldn't share. I swear I should be on podcast, but it's annoying.

Oh, you can swear on it. So there's lot a shift, isn't there? Like there is a lots of organisational change, a lof of frustrations, Like fundamentally, that thing of the patient coming into the room, closing the door and sharing their worries, whether it's a worry of their sore throat or a worried of that cancer or they're dealing with their parent, their partner, someone dying.

It still feels a privilege to be in that space with an individual and try and help them. So I still like general practice. I love general practise. So this isn't a way out of general practice for me this I'm doing this because I feel like it's important and necessary Yeah, and I know basically Yeah and you love both aspects and i remember you're one of those people I remember exactly where we were when we had our first conversation And I Remember you talking about that, you know your passion for the eastern philosophies and the stuff that you've learned and bringing that into Western medicine and how you can do that, how can you bridge that gap and help people, which is really hard in a 5-10 minute appointment, isn't it?

How have you managed to fuse those things or are they very separate parts of your life?

Building Yoga for Medics

So lots of my patients know that I'm into eastern philosophies and I don't know if you have you watched that apple cider vinegar on netflix it's really interesting because that goes into like the extreme of like alternative practices and so that's about people with cancer um not having conventional treatments and I 100% believe in Western medicine as well but I think there's a lot that can complement from the Eastern side and a moral way of living and remembering that deep down beneath all the layers of what's happening to us at our core we are actually content, joyful people and we lose touch with that when we're constantly giving out busy, doing, caring So for me, that's reminding people of that and what do they need to get to that sometimes.

Like we can't be there all the time, but helping people to back to their true nature when they can and reminding them that it's always there. It's just covered up sometimes Amazing, I love that.

So tell me about how this developed from you know, the teaching, going to Bali, wanting to give back into the business that you have today. So you've been with me along this journey as like a classic GP medic at the start.

I was like, Well, I want to do everything, like I've got a little interest in obesity, so maybe I could do like obesity. Maybe I can teach yoga, maybe i can do coaching, Maybe i could all of it!

And you're like, just choose one thing, Just choose on thing! Just niche! It took me bloody ages, didn't it? Like, i'm more than a year into this. with you and it's been amazing but they're slight little seeds that just for me have taken longer to grow than they have for some other people.

I think partly it is because like I'm working pretty much full-time as a partner as well but the whole process is very much a learning journey about yourself as So yeah, I set off trying to do some coaching and teaching yoga locally.

And I still teach my local yoga classes, which is like the highlight of my week. I love it. But I've given up on the coaching because I find I think it's a very populated space.

It's very competitive space and I realize it doesn't really suit my personality. to sit with one person for a whole hour, I find it quite intense. And you know, right at the start you say, what are your values?

What do you enjoy? what do like? And I'm like, helping people. But for me, that's quite hard. I am really drained by that. So yeah, so now I've like come, at right the very start, you're like Fiona, why don't you get on Facebook and just set up a group and teach a bloody yoga class.

And honestly, it'll be more than 12 months ago. Anyway, 12 month later, I'm here. I mean here, doing it. So we started on Tuesday. The next one's on Sunday.

We're doing a six week course. You've got like nearly 200 people on my email list. Had over 30 people turn up in person on Thursday. really amazing but I don't know why it took me so long.

Well it did because that's normal and the process does take time and you talked about sowing those seeds and it's like learning a completely different language and and, you are not the only person to struggle with that concept of the fact that we can help everybody and we do have all of these sort of things that the more specific a niche you are to start with, the easier it is to get traction.

And that's what, you know, if you'd had this experience six months ago, then you might have felt differently. But equally, You've probably had This experience because of what you've done over the last six month.

So it's a bit of a chicken and an egg. Don't beat yourself up about it, because you have now been able to go out there confidently and say, know, this is what you need to do, scan this QR code, fill in this form, join this group, I'll turn up on Zoom and I will do this, but tell us about this Group because it's quite specific, isn't it?

So what is it that you're doing? It's a six-week course for medics and healthcare professionals, so basically anyone who spends their life giving out, holding space, caring for others, because I think we're unique, well, There's quite a lot of evidence, isn't there, that we go into these professions because actually what we really want is for somebody to take care of us.

But we don't, we take of other people and we're excellent because we know what feel we need and give that. But it's straining. It's exhausting. So this is just a little six week course for people who are holding space for others to come back to themselves where I'll guide through gentle, simple yoga practices and we'll remind ourselves that that happy, chilled being is still there inside of us.

Wonderful. And hopefully we will be able to link link your details up in the show notes and then next time you run a course hopefully people will be able to jump on your news.

Yeah and like actually if people want to join now they can. It's not like a building up course, it's just six weeks, come

and go as you please. If you're on the list I'll email out the recordings, there's no pressure.

if you miss any you are not missing anything. So yeah, you can use it as it works for you basically. So Tuesdays are just a half an hour, a bit more flow practice and the Sunday's an hours long, more chilled.

We also have a nice playlist that you could listen to. You can choose to do it whenever it suits. But it's quite nice if you join live because you're in the community then.

Wonderful. Well done. That's absolutely brilliant. I want to come back to time, right? Now, you are pretty much a full-time GP partner. You've got three kids, You are very busy and you touched on something which is about not growing as quickly as other people.

And this is one of the struggles I've had with bringing a cohort of medics together. Who knew meds were so competitive? Everyone's like, oh, hang on a minute.

She's going much quicker than I am. I'm like slow down everyone. Remember, some of you are retired. Some of haven't got children and are not working. some have you work one day a week.

You are full-time partners with three children. Realistically, you don't have as much time in your day. So how important do you think it is to allocate time to the business?

How did you even manage to find time in your busy week? So that's what I've found really brilliant, working with you and being part of the community, because even though I probably been to less than 10% of live things, it's a constant, just gentle reminder And motivation, I'm genuinely not a competitive person like my children are.

Well, maybe I am, people who say, but genuinely when I hear other people in the group doing things, oh my God, that's amazing. And I don't feel like, Oh shit, why aren't I doing that?

But I think that that is cool, it's working for them, so I can do that too. So for me, it has really, really helped being with you. You're a little gentle, come on, you're all right.

And you were like nice, reassuring voice notes. Like it is hard and just keep going, just keeping going and giving myself permission to take a break. So like before Christmas, complete life was just too much.

I was like, I'm switching off from this. switching off and not thinking was what brought me back in January to I'm going to do this six-week course. That's when the seed grew, when I totally switched off from it.

Yeah that happens a lot, I find that absolutely happens whenever we go away in the winter and I just really go down to basics, that's where all of my best ideas happen, you allow that space for them to come in for you to explore it a little bit, for to just remove something from your life is important sometimes, isn't it?

And actually I interviewed Jo Hartley recently and she was saying that sometimes when she on the programme she felt like a naughty school kid, like going, I'm gonna take a break for a month, is that gonna be okay?

Like wondering if I was gonna notice? But I think most people have and that is totally fine, doesn't? Yeah, definitely. And the recordings are there.

Balancing Business, Family, and Time

as well if you know so the information's there when you're ready to look at it or deal with it yeah okay so what about the great things what do you enjoy now about having you you are a pretty like this portfolio gp concept like what Do you love about running your own business we'll talk about The kind of highs and the lows I want this to be a really honest reflection but what you really love So I love when I've led a class or guided a and you can just see people's faces.

You can see they've really got something out of it. So that is real. I feel like, yeah, that's why I'm doing this. That in terms of what I am doing with the yoga.

In terms the business, what i've loved is meeting all these most amazing people that I never would have come across. It's opened my world in a way. that I never knew there was anything missing.

Like, like you say, my life is full, I'm happy, but I've met like, you and Bex and Emma and Jo and, and Portia and like all these just amazing other human beings that just I wouldn't have met.

And, being part of, then being of other groups and yeah, for me, that's been like the best The best bit. Yeah. It's like finding your tribe, it's cheesy, but it is true, right?

Yeah, 100%. I'm like, oh yeah, there's other crazy people like me out there. Other crazy medics with her brain scheme. My university friends are delighted.

They're like oh great, you've found some other crazies to talk to about this stuff. Stop running our ear about it. Amazing. What about the struggles? Your full-time partner, three kids, we've said it before, That can't always be easy.

What are the difficult things? So, yeah, the the difficulty things are time. I sometimes feel like I'm doing everything badly. You know, I am at work thinking, shit, i need to get home for the kids.

And with the kid thinking or really want to do some stuff on Instagram or not all the time, but you know what I mean? I want do do stuff in the business and doing the bussiness feeling a bit guilty that I should be with kids So I guess it's like always trying to find that balance.

But for me, even without the business, like you're like that anyway, you know, when you work and when have a family or even if you don't have family in your work, You're always try to that find balance which is rarely in balance, so yeah, feeling spread too thinly is tricky.

And what made you, I'm trying to think back, because I think you applied for a grant, didn't you? So, tell us about that, cause I that's something that people overlook, the potential when you are starting a business, there are potentially pockets of money available that you can use for business coaching and business development.

So tell us a little bit about that. Yeah. My grant was from the North York Moors National Park and they were, what was it for? They had grants for new businesses and there were different criteria that could apply under.

I applied under wellness and wellbeing. Um, so basically getting tourists into the park, um, using wellness and wellbeing activities. So they gave me the money for half of my kit.

Um. And then saw my yoga mats and bolsters and I bought like a speaker. Cause I also do yoga in the national park like outdoors. Do yoga on the beach in a summer.

There's a beautiful farm nearby that we run retreats that I run with treats on. Yeah, that was. And you got the money for that? Yeah, I think I got about like two or three thousand pounds.

Yeah. And then also they give you help with marketing as well, if you want it. I. Think it's always good to explore all of these little pockets of money.

So in my in, my PDF from Stethoscope to start up and in one of the I, think it was episode 26 where I go through this needing for you need time, you, need money, You need a sense of place for your business so that it's a proper thing and you need the right people around you.

And we've talked a little bit about all four of those things, haven't we? And I think the money piece, you can find these pots of money. So get out there, find out your local business networks, community stuff that you might be

involved in.

In Wales, there's the sort of business Wales schemes. just to be able to give you that pot to get started, because there's so many things at the beginning.

How unsure were you about investing in that kind of mentoring coaching, or was it something that you obviously had experience with because you were a coach yourself?

So, yeah, I recognise the value of coaching because, yes, And actually, very randomly, someone on LinkedIn who I know who's a friend of a Friend, who is also a coach, she was like, oh my God, talk to Jo, She's amazing.

I don't know why I was, I must have commented on one of her posts saying, you know, how are you doing this or something? And yes, he recommended you. So that was it.

And then as soon as we talked, and I'm like oh yeah, Yeah. Well, that's another example. And again, we talk about that inner circle of trust. It's in my module five, and it's my favorite bit of module 5, because everybody says to me, well, how do you find clients?

And everyone's like, do I post on social media? Like, what do i do? I'm just posting. Actually, the vast majority of people that have ever found me have, they haven't just like randomly fallen across something.

They might have seen me a couple of times, but then there's been that that vote of confidence from somebody that they trust. And if you have built a network of people in an authentic way, you've shown up as yourself, You've gone out there and said, this is how I can help people.

Do you know anybody? You know, having that trust factor is vital, isn't it? And it's also an example, I think, of being referable. You want to be referrable.

This is where it comes down to niche as well, doesn't? I love it in my practice where somebody comes in with a problem and I say, you need to go to this person's Instagram and you to follow them because they've got great advice that you will be able to take on board.

What do you think about that, that referability and the trust factor? Definitely. And because this, especially in the coaching space, it's very, very busy.

It's fairly competitive. There's lots of people who you read their stuff and you're like, that's cool. You look nice. Like, I like you. I liked what you were saying, but there's probably five people that I know like the social media algorithms show you things that you will like.

Still, if there's five or six, you'll probably choose none versus somebody saying, oh yeah, actually, she's really good. I've worked with her. Yeah, so being referable, not being scared.

You said before we hit record, you were scared, Tanish. I was scared Tanesh because you feel, it feels, It's very counterintuitive.

Funding, Networking, and Trust

Like you, feel like if you limit your audience, You're limiting your possibilities. But like we were chatting about this before you clicked record how, um, I've had a general yoga Instagram page for ages and then as soon as I said I'm running this six-week course, Yoga for Medics, my sign-up just absolutely skyrocketed because I niched but I was really scared to do that.

I thought I might alienate like other people who weren't medics or healthcare professionals but no, it's mad but it is very counterintuitive. It really feels uncomfortable.

Yeah. And I think it feels particularly uncomfortable for GPs because as I always say, we are the opposite of that. You know, there is no exclusion criteria applied.

Yep. Jack of all trades. Exactly. With nobody ever having to go out there and find people. It's like you're actually shutting the door on people rather than having do any marketing.

So what does the future hold for you for yoga, for general practice? So a little bit, I know you won't like this, but I'm a a go with the flow person in the sense there's always that balance of having a goal but enjoying where you are.

If you become too fixated on the feature, you lose where are now. Like I'm trying to enjoy and be really present, doing the yoga for healthcare professionals, teaching my local classes, but the kids as well, like as you know, my eldest son left home last August and I just, I want to really be with the kid aswell, cause that all goes really quickly, But I think ultimately I'd like to continue with The Yoga for Medics, I'd like to form a community of medics and healthcare professionals who are into yoga where we can support each other, share ideas, hopefully run us a retreat eventually.

And I would maybe like reduce my general practice a little bit so that I could put more time and effort into the yoga without impacting too much on the fam.

So that's kind of it, but I'm also just letting it be a bit organic and seeing where it leads me. Yeah. And I need a little bit of a trickle of that myself.

I think that being present, we talked a lot about these on these podcasts as medics, I think we are super driven, we're often able to do a lot, like we can turn our hands to stuff, which means that the possibilities are, you know, often there are many of them.

And I am definitely one of those people that is often looking too far ahead and not enjoying the present. So I that that's a really good reminder and message to me of something that I have promised myself that I will do.

As you say, the kids grow up really quickly. And I say this to anybody that comes to me with young children or a family wanting to build a business. We need to be mindful of the time that, yes, we are around for our kids, but are we actually giving them the times that they need?

Are we really present or are just thinking about what we should be doing instead? And it is a real conundrum and a really balance. I think just having the awareness of that is, is first and foremost, the most important thing.

I thinking previous businesses that I've run, I haven't had that awareness at all. Certainly in the granola days when I was pregnant with my third, so I had six, six and a four year old pregnant, with third.

Right. Didn't think about whether or not what I doing was helping me be with the family or no. Whereas, whereas now that. The priority. So, you know, thank you for sharing that.

And if you have any tips on how to remain present and not constantly look into the future, I'd gratefully receive them. Well, it's natural that our minds are amazing.

Our minds aren't amazing and it is natural they generate these ideas all the time. It's like, OK, Thank you. I'm just not doing that right now. But it was hard.

Like, It is a bit of a practice and I definitely have not got it right. My kids are like… Mum, get off your phone! You know, you're like, oh, it should be me saying, I, Get off Your Phone!

And it's sometimes them and I'm like oh yeah, yes, like put the phone away. But it is not easy, but also I think, we are teaching our children Like, I have boys on a girl, but I don't know if it's particularly about, like, women or whatever.

But, you know, with teaching our children, we're modelling to our own children that, follow your dreams.

Future Plans and Advice

Do you understand what I mean? Like we could sit, and it is totally valid to say, You know what? My kids are everything. I'm not going to do this now.

We're going wait till they go. Also it then where do you, will you lose a bit, you can lose, a little bit of yourself in that so it's that balance of following your dreams and modelling that to our kids that they also can and should do that.

versus actually also being there. So yeah, basically, no, I don't have any answers. That was a long-winded way of saying that. Love it. Yeah, we are modelling what is possible as well, my kids are sometimes like, what are you actually doing now?

And I'm like well this has kind of come to me. People have started asking me to do this. I've explored it and now this is kind the main thing. And this wasn't the thing two years ago.

I think that's important as well, because our children are coming into a world where they're not going to be in careers for life. They're going be doing all sorts of things.

So if we can show them what is possible, then hopefully that will help them along the way. You've been amazing. I've loved talking to you Fiona. And I always ask everybody, and you've touched on a few things already, but what would be your piece of advice to somebody setting out in business or your early entrepreneurial self?

What would your advice be? I would say follow your heart and don't give up. Very, very, good advice. So not giving up is key, isn't it? I think a lot of people give just before things were actually going to work out.

Follow your dreams. Don't Give up, keep going, take one step in front of another, little steps as well. Take a break. We're not saying head down, that hard pushing, but softly, I'm taking a And then when it, when you're ready, just chip away just little, little bits, even if you just doing it like once a month, like for me, you had two months off, but if, and if if he lose the love of it.

Then you not following your heart. So that's fine. Go where like go with the flow. But if the floor is taking you still that way, Just keep chipping away, jump out the boat for a bit, have a rest and then.

Pop back in. Love it. Brilliant advice. You've been an absolute star. We'll link everything up in the show notes below. Thank you for your time, Fiona, and I'll see you soon.

See 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.