How Health Coaches Can Support Cognitive and Emotional Health Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to Health Coaching

It takes a team to heal. And what I've realized, and a lot of other practitioners realize that there's a missing component to practicing medicine, especially when it comes to brain health.

And these are health coaches and health coaches, are paving the way into the future to create this underlying trust. And safety that within the medical system that allows healing to truly occur.

Well, a lot of times we may feel like we're kind of focusing on the negative things about health. And maybe if doctors do the same thing as well. What health coaches do is they focus on the positive aspects of life and encouragement in a very non-judgmental way.

And every person in who we deal with, our clinic, when it comes to brain health, every person we try to guide has health coach, have has health coaching.

That's along with it as well to create that path. So there's no one better to talk about that than Doctor Sandra Sheinbaum. And she's a great friend of mine.

Known each other for years. And she is an educator, licensed clinical psychologist for over 40 years. She's also the founder of the Functional Medicine Coaching Academy.

She trains people, to become health coaches and, and really elevates the health coaching profession. And hopefully that will be the solution to combating chronic, mental and physical health disorders in the future.

So, as the founder of the Functional Medicine Coaching Academy, and she collaborates with the Institute for Functional Medicine and and also is the author of How to Become a Health Coach, Functional Medicine, Health coaching and start Panic Attack in ten Easy Steps.

Super proud to introduce you, doctor Sandy. I'm so excited to have you on to talk about this beautiful thing called health coaching that's really transformed my life and the way I practice medicine.

So thanks for coming on. It's a pleasure. Excited to talk about health coaching. Yeah. So, you know, most people don't know, that health coaches are a thing now.

What Health Coaches Do

And so for the people listening to this, and if they're going through brain disorders or they have family issues, family members going through mental and brain health disorders, one of the biggest key players in the game, or asking your health coaches to, help guide the process along.

And we've discovered that, you know, my facility at Texas Center for Lifestyle Medicine, but can you just, kind of walk people through exactly what a health coach actually does and how they fit between like a, in a, between, of the patients and then the doctor's role within a, within a facility. Absolutely.

So coaches are the bridge between doctors and patients. Let me talk first about what they're not. So there's often confusion I hear all the time. Oh, a health coach.

Is that kind of like a nutritionist? No, because a nutritionist role is to, for example, look at developing meal plans, see, what do traditional inadequacies might be present looking at bloodwork?

Well, the health coach, they are not licensed providers. They are not the ones who are going to make a diagnosis.

Those who are going to establish a treatment plan, that's for the medical doctor, that is for a nutritionist, a dietician, a psychologist, for example.

And what they do is act is the behavior change specialists. They help people change when change is hard. And when we're talking about making lifestyle changes, deciding I'm going to change how I eat or I'm going to embark on an exercise plan.

Well, often those are hard to sustain and obstacles get in the way. And a coach is your ally, your accountability partner. They are the ones who help you with going over and over again to what is mattering most in your life.

What do you want your health for? And as a result, they are the ones helping people to carry out the plan that the doctor may have established. And so that is why we say they're the secret sauce, because you can go to all the experts in the world.

You can know exactly what you want to do. You can have good intentions. But then at the end of the day, how are you actually going to carry out those intentions?

Yes. And not only that, I think it's also the bridge, between the caregivers and the family members and the patients. Yeah. I tell you that many times that, you know, there's people who we see in medical practices who either don't want coaching or they have sort of this, this, this thought about coaching that they don't necessarily need it so they don't have it.

And it's so much harder to see the patient improve without coaching significantly harder and so much so that we're now like making like an actual part of the progress.

I think coaching is actually part of this because it's an absolute necessity and essential, especially when it comes to brain health and mental health, because what most people don't understand is that the the connections between the patients and the family members, the caregivers, all that affects the way the disease state progresses and especially with like dementia and memory loss and stuff like that as well.

And so whenever we whenever I think about a health coach, I think about this beautiful support system that's non-judgmental. Okay. And, and they meet people where they're at, they're not not necessarily pushing people into anything.

There's no there's no fear there. And it's all about sort of this, this empowerment. And I love it because it health coach is really focus on the positive things about the journey rather than, a lot of people kind of perceive it on the negative things, especially like caregivers and stuff like that.

So does that kind of also explain what the scope of health. Oh, absolutely. And the reason for that, it's because health coaching really evolved from humanistic psychotherapy.

So that was what I studied way back in the late 70s, early 80s. And at the time, there really wasn't such a thing as coaching. And so the idea of a client centered humanistic approach, that was psychotherapy instead, it is all about the client.

It is client centered. And so the coach who is they're not doing psychotherapy. So again, they're not the providers. They are the ones who are going to be completely unbiased.

And first and foremost, their listeners. And so many people don't feel heard right now. And coaches have the time within an encounter. So people may go off and go to their doctor and they feel rushed, or they feel like that person is like the authority figure, and they may be afraid to tell them certain things, but the coach is more like their peer, and they know that there's no judgment, there's no bias that the coach has, and it is where that individual wants to start.

And then it's where they going to start. And often it's very tiny baby steps to get to reach a goal.

The other role that a coach plays that is becoming increasing important is they are the advocate for this patient, for the caretakers, so that they will be the communication bridge between the patient and their families and the medical practice.

And it can also work in reverse. So let's say there was a treatment plan created or certain recommendations were made. People don't understand. Or perhaps they got a bill and they're not like, what was I charged for?

They don't understand. Well, the coach, because they are these specialist trained in listening that that person who may have the complaint will feel heard.

And they also know that that coach is listening to them and will report back to the medical practice about any issues that may arise. And this is a really important role that they are increasingly playing in medical practices.

Yes. And one thing that, I do want to point out is that, there's a lot of bridges that need to be in that needs to be built. Between doctors and especially the one, especially when it comes to brain health, because, you know, I think that in, in the field of like neurology and psychiatry, there's a lot of tools to diagnose, but there's actually very few, few tools to treat or reverse a condition.

Right. And so, but part of it is because, the, the way that we're actually viewing, health care, right now is that if there's not necessarily a prescription for it, then we call it like disease management. Right.

And so now also let's talk about management of a disease. So if, if what what we're currently trying to do in medicine, for disease management is to make sure that people are compliant with their medications, and maybe lifestyle here and there.

Right. And that's kind of, but the there's, but there's no safety that's around that. It's like you're just kind of waiting for things to happen. And in fact, this is why a lot of doctors actually burnt out in these professions.

Right. Where the coach comes in, where we see, especially in our practice, is that they tease out so many more things from people, from the patient, from the family members that we, the providers, didn't even know about.

And then we find all of a sudden easy things to, to, to tackle now. Right? Because so many things within a patient's daily lives, we don't necessarily have the time to ask, or have them know how to ask for the moment.

We're, we're teasing these things out. We're like, oh yeah, we should do this. And so I can't tell you how many times like coach is actually prevented.

People like going to the E. R. or going to urgent care, for something that, that's very easily understood just from an outpatient point of view. So it really saves time and energy, money and angst, especially with the, with the caregivers.

And, and I see this most often in people, neurological disorders specifically like Parkinson's, the mentioned Alzheimer's, dementia, these two and and it's because, it's because these coaches are actually trained from the communication process to tease out certain things of things that we practitioners really need to, to know and understand about.

And so and I find that to be very beautiful, relationships of knowing just knowing just hey, there's some things that, that, you know, that everyone should really know.

And also making sure that there is that bridge and making sure that we get people like in who are urgently need to, to be seen. Right. And if we can't see them urgently, they may make sure they work with our staffs and make sure that, hey, we need to create some, some, some, some, some emergent urgent care here, so that we're able to, you know, prevent that, that failure point and so on.

So this then this also comes on the mental health sector. Right? So we have a lot of people with like a lot of traumas and PTSD and stuff like that. And and we start noticing things in our, our health coaches pick up, especially on the health coaching notes that we have no idea about.

And I'm like, oh, this is kind of a big deal. For their health, right. And I'm so super thankful that the health coaches really elevates and the ability for other providers and practitioners and doctors like myself, they really elevate the things that we can actually do to take take our powers, you know, significantly further as well.

So absolutely. Well, that was beautifully said. And coaches increasingly are supporting emotional wellness, mental health and brain health. So is coaching.

Has health coaching was really established. It was common to associate coaching with more like helping people carry out a food plan, a diet plan. They were working on people, people who wanted to lose weight, for example.

And now, especially after the pandemic, we're seeing such a rise in anxiety and depression, people having difficulty dealing with the stressors in their life.

And that, of course, is impacting brain health. And so what coaches are doing increasingly is they're becoming emotional health coaches where they're not, again, they're not diagnosing or treating any psychic condition.

They're not doing psychotherapy. And at our school, we're very clear on what those boundaries are and when to refer out. For a licensed mental health specialist.

They do help people to see that they're not alone, to see that these feelings they experiencing are normal. They often are doing this in groups, which is again, like, I'm not alone.

No, others are feeling like I am. And that itself becomes the medicines for healing. And they're also helping them with problem solving and developing a way that they can apply perspective and think about their own thinking and make those adjustments so that they are experiencing less anxiety, less mood shifts.

And so that is an area that I think we're going to see great growth in health coaching, and particularly for those who are experiencing cognitive impairment.

There is actually a wonderful book. It's a positive psychology book called Living Well with Dementia. And it shows it actually defies a lot of the stereotypes that, you cannot live well with.

And so it goes into the character strengths that people have, things like creativity, love, and ways that they could still have a life worth living despite this diagnosis.

So, you know, I think a lot of what you just touched on is really important because it's all about perspective, right? So there's diseases and there's quality of life and they don't necessarily, you know, have to be opposite things.

People living with chronic disorders can have amazing quality of life, really, depending on their perspective. And I think the health coaches are really the missing piece to to get people to like, value that through, you know, this positive psychology, right? Yes.

And so this, this understanding that, you know, we have to be, you know, categorized into, you know, one disease state or one bucket. And these are the things and eventually this is how we die.

It's not the diseases really shouldn't define humans. You know, humans, we're all individuals. And we all have this amazing ability to to adapt. And so some of the most inspiring people I've ever met are people with pretty bad chronic neurological disorders, but their outlook is just absolutely, you know, fantastic.

You know, they'll see phrases like, you know, I have Parkinson's, but Parkinson's doesn't define who I am. It's just a part of one of my diagnoses. And that's okay.

But I still value you. You know, my wife, my husband, my, etc., etc. and so that and, and it's rare that we can deliver that from like a doctor's office standpoint because I'm not trained to talk like that.

No way. And in fact, I might be trying to do the opposite. Just kind of thinking back on medical training, in general. And so I think that part of the part of the coaching process is that it kind of honors sort of the mind body medicine component, to the to the healing process.

And there's other people that I've interviewed that are neurologists and psychologists and psychiatrists who all agree that the belief and the perception of our health really dictates our physical health.

Mind-Body Medicine and Coaching Strategies

You know, mindfulness and meditation and prayer, stuff like that changes the way our genes are actually expressed, even after just ten minutes. We've been able to that, see that in science.

And so I think coaching is absolutely needed. Now, the people who are listening to this, the and maybe listening for the first time that, oh my gosh, there's such a thing as a, as a health coach, how do you think people can can find a health coach.

Like what do you what do you even work. Sure. So, we have the, on our website. We have a directory of find a coach. You want to look for a coach who is nationally board certified.

So that is the gold standard. It means that that coach to not just take some weekend class. And instead I'm calling myself a health coach, means they met some rigorous criteria.

They went to an approved school. They passed an exam. They're meeting the minimum standards for competency and going above and beyond to seek this certification, this board certification, so they can look like the National Board for Health and Wellness Coaching.

And we're at FMC, an approved school. So, our coaches do go on and seek that board certification. And then you would often people go to their doctor and say, hey, you know, I, I want to work with a health coach.

And that's a way to grow awareness in the medical community. That health coaches can be the ones who help people make these very difficult changes. And, so we're seeing a big increase.

And medical practices like your practices are really seeing the great value of a coach and a solid coaching practices. And so as a school, we are committed to training coaches and also to educating them and educating the public about the power of coaching.

Yeah, absolutely. And I can't, I can't I can't emphasize that more that coaches are actually needed and just from a statistic point of view, we know that, you know, pre-pandemic, about 49% of doctors were truly burnt out.

And now post ten, that's above 60% now. And part of it is, there's no way to really deal with isolation and loneliness, and this new sort of cancel culture phenomenon, it's really going on and on social media, and, and having that translate into like higher levels of distress.

And, you know, most, most doctors are actually burnt out because there's a sense of distrust from the patients and them. And it doesn't necessarily come from something bad, the doctor is saying becomes an uncertainty because there's a lot of information that's out there on the internet and they're contradicting each other.

And, you know, during the pandemic, even the doctors are kind of like contradicting each other. So we're we live in an age for the first time that I think I've ever seen that it's not okay to agree to disagree.

You know, it's like, yeah, yeah. And it isn't necessarily, you know, it doesn't necessarily have to be that way. But I think where we're coaching comes comes in is coaches can actually rise above that.

You know. And so you know, despite what people say, we still, you know, value the things that we, we value, you know. And so let's kind of get through this, this last point, which is mind body medicine.

Can you tell us the power of mind body medicine and how the coaches really employ those strategies? Yeah. This is a subject near and dear to my heart, because it's how I got started in this field many, many years ago.

And, talking late 70 years. And I would join these organization and self-regulation therapies, and it was considered so radical. You know, the idea that you can stop and create some awareness of how you were breathing and that could create a physiological change that I would have doctors throw you out of their office, like, get out of here.

Like there's no evidence what you're talking about. And, and so we have seen an evolution, in this field, we now have the imaging techniques that are refined enough to see the profound changes.

And it was something I started seeing back in the 70s. Like, what's real in the mind is real in the body. And we now have the data to prove that. So it is how you approach your circumstances and, what, what how you define yourself, be how you have hope.

So we can consider that part of mind body medicine. Because if you are if your thoughts are hopeful and you are experiencing optimism, then that's going to have a big effect.

At the end, if around your immune system, there's a field called psycho neuro immunology, where it looks at the interaction. So what are some of the strategies?

Because that's I think what would be important for people to know. And that is there are a variety and it is not one size fits all. So it is not if you have someone just say, oh, go meditate, but not be right for somebody.

For example, I did a lot of work as a psychologist, people with panic attacks, and I see that, well, if they were told to meditate and they would have a severe panic attack in the process because they were not ready for that stillness for them, something, that would be more of a guided technique or doing an activity that they loved, like taking a walk and talking to a friend.

That would be, a form of meditating. So it was not just closing your eyes and sitting for 20 minutes in stillness. Their thoughts will overwhelm them, and they'll start here feeling their heart beating, and that will send them into a panic.

Somebody else might really enjoy that. So if they find an activity, it could be breathing. It could be using muscle relaxation. That's an old tried and true where you tense a muscle that comes from progressive muscle relaxation had been Jacobsen in the 20s.

And then you let it all go. You can focus on imagining hand warming. And you did a lot of that work with biofeedback, and you send warmth down to your fingertips.

Or it is a guided imagery where you are imagining you're going deep into an imaginative process. There are many ways that you can have what we call a mind body medicine experience, where you are, really feeling this power.

And, a lot of it is about your imagination and an awareness in the moment of your physical state, something as simple as just like, oh, I'm slouching over.

I'm going to stand up straighter. I'm going to feel more strength. Well, that's going to create better breathing space. And a coach could guide you through this.

So coaches are the we train coaches in this mind body medicine. Them all these modalities and coaches can also educate people. So something I wanted to get back to you were talking about earlier.

Like all of the information that's out there on the internet, for example, people are confused. And so coaches can help them sift through and decide what's right.

Or even it's something like, oh, I was listening to the radio and an ad came on for a brain boost health supplement. And what, you know, so they don't know, but coaches can help them, to see like, you know, the the advertising behind it and quality.

And so that is another way that coaches can be that communicator and also feedback this information to the medical practice. Yeah. Deciphering information that gets marketed to you I think that's so important.

You know. Yeah. And so you know, the and the kind of brings me to, to a couple stories. So recently, you know, one of my, my coaches, went on vacation and then there's this sort of freak out.

It's all of us, the doctors, the nurse practitioners, everyone.

Becoming a Health Coach

We're like, oh, my God, she's gone. You like, what do we do? And then there's, there's almost like this universal level tension that just elevates even within my staff, my front desk, my back office, my, my, my medical assistance.

And then when they came back were like, oh, okay, thank God. And it's because we didn't we didn't I guess we didn't realize, like, how much coaching actually created this, this calm and, and safeness, you know, with, with people and patients even within us as well.

And, and part of that is because, you know, we actually do the mind body medicine piece that our coaches teach the patients and stuff like that. And sometimes we need to be held accountable as well.

So it does go, you know, all directions. I think coaches are great for the patients. I think coaches are great for the doctors and the practitioners. The coaches are great for the administrators, and the coaches are great for the entire staff.

It doesn't matter who it is. So, and so it's that's a very recent thought process just, just came on and I'm like, you know, I'm so thankful that we have our coaches to, to, to accomplish this, you know, and, and just kind of ending on this topic of, of mind body medicine, you know, people think that, oh, maybe, you know, I just changed the way I feel and belief systems and stuff like that and everything will be okay.

Well, that's a process, you know, and, a lot of our behaviors are invisible to us. Even me, Steph, especially me actually. And so, sometimes we don't have we have people around us that we may take care of.

Right? But we don't necessarily have a third independent party to, to, to bounce back off of. And that's crucially important. You know, me personally, you know, I also have a business coach and I have a I have a life coach as well.

Right. And so, the power of what the coaches can do dramatically improves my quality of life and in the life of a life around me. And so and I wish every person that's going through like, you know, brain health and just chronic disease in general, has at least a coach, to help that guiding process.

It is it is a big difference, you know, and I'll tell you, no one's ever regretted a coaching visit, ever in our facility. Right. And that's always going to be true.

But it's really, you know, time to kind of get to take it a step. And so now some people are listening to this maybe, like, inclined to be a health coach.

And so, how does that process work with, functional medicine coach Academy? Sure. Well, first of all, you don't need a background in healthcare. In fact, sometimes that could even get in your way.

We have doctors who are in our program, and they are saying, gee, you know, they have their with people in their cohort group because it's experiential.

And people learn in small groups and they say, well, you know, I, I just have a hard time not being the expert, not just like telling people what to do and using that coach approach.

And those who come from many backgrounds, we have just so many people who have been in corporate, they are feeling like, you know, they want to be in a profession that feeds their soul, that is fulfilling their mission and purpose in life to serve others.

Often they have gone through their own struggles themselves, or they've seen a loved one who has been experiencing, dealing with chronic disease. And now they they want to give back.

And so you don't need a background in healthcare. You don't need a background in nutrition. What you need is to be a good listener and come to sessions with mindfulness, hope, compassion.

It is a profession that is transformative. As we as you study to be a coach, you are personally transformed. And so what? You learn our principles at our school, we teach functional medicine principles, which is root cause.

How to see that? Often if we dig deep enough to the root cause of chronic conditions, it's something like inflammation. What's driving that? It's lifestyle factors.

And so coaches will help people with what they're eating and their movement throughout the day, the relationships, their sleep and how they're dealing with the stress in their life.

And some of the best coaches have no background whatsoever in, in health care. But we do have a fair amount of people also who are wanting to blend the coach approach with what they're already doing.

Perhaps they are a doctor, they are a nurse, they're a dietitian, and they still want to do that work. And now they're doing it with a coach approach.

Or we also have doctors who are studying with us because they they don't want to miss out. They've hired health coaches and they say, I'm going to learn this.

I want to be a coach. We also have some practitioners who are saying, you know, the time is right for me to be a coach. And I I'm in this phase of my life where I'm not going to continue with my medical practice or my psychology practice, and I am going to become a coach.

So many different ways that you can use your coaching. And again, it is a personal transformation as well as professionally. It's amazing. It's a it's a great way to, kind of get to the next level, of communication.

And I think, that's that's something that in the world not truly needs. So what is the URL of your, the website? It is functional medicine coaching.org.

Perfect. Very easy. Functional medicine coaching.org. We'll see. Any thanks for being on what's been a great conversation. And, and the fact that the fact of the matter is that, without health coaches, I don't think I would be actually doing what I'm doing today.

So I want to thank you for, for spearheading that, as well. Well, thank you. It's been a pleasure to be here. With.