Sponsor Intro and Guest Preview

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All right, another episode and you know what that means. It's time for some pre-cals. So what's going on, gents, today? Well, Jerry, we've got Jordan Russ joining us.

Just going to share a little bit about her. She's been a great friend and was absolutely fantastic to meet her this past year at the Texas Society of Sleep Professionals.

Did a good job presenting there and so fortunate to have her on our show today. but I thought I'd share a little bit about her in our pre-cals instead of in her show, so we didn't take away from that.

But just a few quick things. Jordan, just real quick, she's a devoted law enforcement spouse and the mother of three children. She's graduate of Alvin Community College's polysomnography program, a registered sleep technologist and holds a bachelor's degree in health care education from Kettering College of Medical Arts.

her extensive experience in COMPASS's roles as a sleep tech clinical coordinator, a polysomnography program at Alvin Community College, and program director of the Polysomniography Program at Durodostic Technology Programs at alvin community college.

Through her roles, as an instructor, political coordinator and Program Director, Jordan has wholeheartedly committed herself to shaping the next generation of healthcare professionals, providing them with essential knowledge and skills for success in the field.

She now serves as sleep educator for Texas Children's Hospital, and will be launching the hospital's first in-house sleep tech training program, congratulations, with an emphasis on pediatric polysomnography.

Jordan Rusk's Path Into Sleep Technology

she's received grants for innovative teaching in a polysomnograph and neurodiagnostic technology programs, received the League of Innovation Excellence in Teaching Award for 2024 and is presented at the BRPT Annual Conference and the Texas Society for Sleep Professionals Annual conference where we got to hear her last year.

So exciting to have Jordan on. She's quite the innovative educator. Yes, she is. And I'll just add there's a little nuance to that. She's moved from Texas Children's and now developing the program at Lone Star College now.

So that's really cool that she's get the opportunity to develop these programs across the Houston area. Robert, what were you going to say? Oh, sorry.

I was going to jump in and say, we're going back to our roots today, an actual sleep tech on Sleep Tech Talk. Right. Imagine that, right? And I hope that once we were able to meet with Jordan, I hoped that people will also see how much she brings value to the field.

And, and I hopes she gets lots of invitations to other regional sleep conferences after this. Well, that I think that roles like hers are so important.

for where we're going in sleep because you've got such an interesting divide going on in asleep right now. And

that's, you know, are we going to be this single channel solution that really defines everyone by a number without looking at all the disorders and all of the challenges that a patient faces?

And I think these kinds of programs really emphasize the importance of looking and why a sleep technologist is important. I say it all the time, people take care of people.

And it's great to see a program like this that's thriving. I agree 100%. I do feel like at times, in particular, because of some of the on-the-job training and things that occur in the field of sleep medicine, that some the basics don't get covered the same way that they used to.

So it certainly is important to have courses and education available to students like this. Sorry, Jerry. No, no, I'm just saying, agree, and you make a really good point.

And with that being said, let's go talk to Jordan. to do it, lights out. Welcome everyone once again to another episode of Sleep Tech Talk, the sleep podcast with your hosts and friends, Emerson Kerr, Robert Miller, and me, Dr.

Gerald George Moneycrew. Folks, thank you so much for joining us. Once again, another amazing episode with another fantastic guest. And we just want to say thank-you so, much, for all that you've been doing for us, all the support, the love that keep showing.

We've grown at the time of this recording to over 40,000 subscribers, and we keep growing because of you. Thank you, so-much, for all of the likes. Thank you for the subscriptions, and even more so thankyou for sharing it with all your friends.

With that being said, we're going to be having a very special treat today with a special type of guest. And Emerson, why don't you tell us a little bit about our guest today?

All right, thanks, Jerry. We are really fortunate to have Jordan Rusk with us today. You know, it's been a little bit since we've had one of our sleep technologists on the show, so this is quite a treat to do.

When we first started the Show, that's pretty much all we had was our friends and colleagues in sleep technology. So this was really quite special moment to get to highlight someone who's doing some amazing things.

is currently the program director, a professor at Lone Star College, Kingwood. Obviously, we talked a little bit about her in the pre-show notes, but Jordan, thank you for being with us today.

It's so exciting to have you on and get to hear about your program and what all you're doing. But before we do that, can you just take a few minutes and tell us how you got into sleep and a bit of about that journey?

Because one of the things we love to do is really make these teachable moments for our colleagues in sleep technology who might want to have a similar path as yours and see the possibilities in their career.

So Jordan, if you don't mind, just take a couple of minutes and tell us a little bit about your journey and why in the world did you choose sleep? Yes, so thank you for having me.

My path to becoming a sleep technologist was a little unconventional, as I think a lot of are, they don't know necessarily this is a healthcare field and career possibility.

So I grew up as a competitive dancer and went to the Performing Arts High School in Houston for all four years of high school as the dance major. And so that was my life trajectory, was I was going to go be a dancer and make that my profession.

Health care wasn't even on the table. I went to college at the Boston Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts. And at end of my freshman year, hurt my back pretty bad.

Had a couple of fractures and arthritis. So it was kind of one of those moments like, OK, is this what I want to do the rest of life? I'm 19, I've already in all this pain.

You know, I'm going to have to struggle right to make a living to do this professionally. So I stuck it out another year and decided I am going back home because this just isn't really what I want for my life.

I come back to Texas and have no idea what i'm gonna do because my whole life has been training dance. Um, so I went to the local community college, which is Alvin community College, um, And was like, okay, I guess I'll do nursing because that's what everybody kind of knows it's a good career path.

So I was doing my prerequisites for the nursing program, which are very competitive to get into and was on the wait list. Though the program director for this sleep program reached out to everyone who didn't get it into various programs thing.

hey, we had this really amazing program here at the college. Do you wanna come learn more about it? So I went and kind of was like, oh my gosh, I didn't even know this was a career.

And it sounded really interesting and was kind what was gonna be like a placeholder for me almost like okay, i'm gonna get into this. I'm going to do something, get my feet wet in the realm of healthcare.

and then if I want to go do Something else I can do that and kinda build up my resume a little bit in healthcare world. But I really fell in love with sleep.

I loved building those connections with the patients. You really build a rapport with them, you know, just in the 12 hours that you're with, them they can tell you a lot of things.

And you really want to help them because you realize how important sleep is and how just crummy they feel when they're not getting good sleep. And I loved titrating patients and in the morning waking up and they are like, oh my gosh, I feel so good.

Or even if they were like I don't feel any different, it's like that's okay. We're going to help you, right? We are going figure out what you need to feel better.

Um, and I got into education in a little roundabout way that really wasn't on my radar either. I graduated from the program at Alvin and was working in an adult sleep lab.

And the program director at Alvin reached out about eight months after I graduate and said, hey, we have this position available as the clinical coordinator.

Career Changes and Building Education Programs

I think you'd be really good for it. And I said I don't think so. Like I have only been out a couple months, you know, eight month I'm working. Um, I just graduated.

It was 23. Just wasn't even on my radar. realm of people that you could pick from. And it was something I didn't realize at the time, but as I've gotten older and just build relationships, I have really come to realize how important, even as a student, building those relationships are and showing that, you can take on things that maybe you're not necessarily qualified for or have experience in.

But if you are asked to do something, your going to figure it out and get it done. So that's what she said. She said, we had these we wanted to start a club, you started the club you raised all this money, um you know you did things and you were proactive and I could trust you with things so I think while yes you have been in the field a long time I'd think you'd be really good at this.

And so that's kind of how I got my feet wet into education and that just manifested into teaching some more classes

and then I became program director of the polysomnography and neurodiagnostic technology program in the height of the pandemic, June of 2020. And I was there for four more years as program director.

before I went to Texas Children's to help them build an education program too. So kind of real roundabout way that I landed in the education side of being a sleep tech, but it ultimately comes down to, I just really love the field.

I love that profession. It's just growing. Sleep is such a hot topic right now too and kind about health and wellness space and helping students find a career that they can make a really good living.

They can have great work-life balance and growth career opportunities in a career that they didn't even really know existed to be able to help patients in different capacity.

You know Jordan, something that you had to go through, very few have to experience and that's a radical, a couple of radical shifts in your career. You know, not just from dancing to sleep but to have a program and then suddenly have to go in a different direction.

How did how did you balance that because you've had two of these things happen in your life, I've been through it, know that that chair and Robert have as well.

What did that teach you about yourself? Because right now, one of the things that sleep technologists face is their lab might close, a program might change like yours did.

How did how did change you as a professional? What does it change in you? what focus did it bring? How does that impact you Well, you have that kind of like shock moment, right?

Of, okay, what do I do now? I was very fortunate that both of my parents are very positive in that they truly do believe things happen for a reason and that the connections you make with people are really valuable and important.

And I think as I've gotten older and experienced some of these things, the value in finding mentors Finding people in your corner and not severing any relationships right and always trying to be positive about it because you never know who is going to Be there to bat for you.

If something does change or that you need to reach out to and say, hey You know, I was at Texas children's for six months. I Was brought there. It's a start a program than they cut my position, you know, and so you're kind of like, oh my gosh, what do I do?

Then you go, okay, well, I have all of these relationships and contacts that I've created and grown over the past 10, 11 years and really lean on those.

So I think it's just always leaving on a positive note and maintaining those relationships with people that you think, ah, why do i need a relationship with them?

you know, a contact, but you just never know what you're going to end up in what situation and who you are going need to lean on or even ask for advice.

And so always just kind of leaning and being positive and not, you now, bad now than anybody or a facility or place. It's just that's what happened. it happened for some reason and instead of dwelling on that, okay, how can I manifest that to find something else to be able to do.

And so being Lego from Texas Children's was devastating because I had left my really comfortable position at Alvin that I was at for 10 years and made this huge leap of faith to move and then six months later that kind of ended.

But then it led me here to Lone Star where they've been trying to create a program for almost 10 and just haven't found the right person. And so now it gives me that ability to build a program here, have more formal education in

the greater Houston area, and provide good quality sleep techs to the hospitals in this area that have such a need, just because there isn't a lot of formal eduction in his area.

So everything happens for a reason. You've got to stay positive about it and go, I have a purpose. I may not know what that purpose is yet, but it'll come.

Yeah. That's fantastic, Jordan. I've got two questions for you. The first is about your program. Is there an online component? And then I'm assuming there's in-person training as well.

And in the second part of the question, I too have been a part developing an educational course for sleep techs to get into the into the industry. But one of the things that sort of transitioned for me is that my message went from there's lots of opportunity in this market to, you know, because we were putting out so many sleep techs into our particular market here in North Carolina at one point that we the sleep labs and there really wasn't as many opportunities.

So I had to change my messaging to collectively look at the opportunity from a sleep perspective. You may not be here when you come course, but you'll have lots of job opportunities, so two-part question.

Yeah, so our program will not have an online component. It will be all face to face since it is an associate's degree. I think face-to-face is the best for students to learn.

We will have a six bed sleep lab here on campus so that they can do all of their labs here, on-campus. So when they go to clinicals, They at least know how to do a basic hookup and then as they progress we can run MSL T's and MWT's, and have them wear some home sleep testing and practice staging and scoring here on campus, before they go out to clinicals.

They will graduate with about a thousand hours of clinicals, which is a lot. And so they will have experience in both the adult and pediatric world day and night rotation so that they can kind of see all the different aspects of what it is to be a sleep technologist.

I understand a of the world is wanting that online. and I tell students that may be what you think you want, but really being in class, having those conversations, asking questions, And hands-on is so important, especially in healthcare.

And a lot of what we do with sleep techs is learning how to talk to patients, right? So that's hard to do sometimes in that online space. It's a little bit easier face-to-face.

You build that rapport a bit quicker too, so they can practice that. So keeping that in mind that people want online, I try to schedule the classes like one or two days a week.

Program Structure, Credentials, and New Therapies

If they still need to work or have family or anything like that, they could still do that it's not you're up here Monday through Friday, eight to five.

We try to consolidate it into like two days or three days, depending on the semester. Stuff a little bit about our program and then saturating the market.

So we are lucky in the Houston area, there are so many sleep labs and there is such a shortage. But we also, when I was at Alvin, kept it kind of small for that reason so that we ensured that students did have a place to go.

It may not have necessarily been their first choice, but now with sleep just growing and expanding, I think exposing them to all of the opportunities, like you said, is, hey, yes, there's night techs.

You can also become a clinical sleep health educator and get that credential. And then what does that look like?

Does that You know, working in a hospital, does that look like working at a DME company sales?

There's a lot of different avenues. So I think it's really important when they're in my program, they are exposed to all of that so that they know. Hey, there is different opportunities and maybe they go to be a night tech and their life needs to change so they can go into sales and they, you know there's that opportunity.

Or go into education that there's those different opportunities, but it is a fear right of saturating especially as sleep kind of changes and evolves, But I think being in this greater Houston area.

we're really lucky that we have so many sleep labs and opportunities. And just kind of being in touch with, hey, what does the market look like in our area?

And then adjusting our cohort sizes so that, we aren't saturating the marketing and that they're not successful in getting a position when they graduate.

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Now back to the show. So a follow-up to that, knowing that this is an associate's degree program, and assuming that these folks would get their RPSDT pretty quickly upon completion of the program.

How prepared are they also from a CCSH standpoint? I see that you're a C-C-S-H. Congratulations on that. Yeah. And how prepared they are for the CCSH credential as well, because that could come pretty quick on the heels of an R-P- S-D-T as Yes.

So they are prepared for it. I kind of sprinkle it in throughout the curriculum and then in their last semester, they just kind have like a board prep course and it's a little bit of both CCSH and that RPSDT.

And I always encourage students take it as soon as you can when you graduate because you still have all that knowledge really fresh from the technical aspect, right?

Because when you go into the lab setting, you start learning their protocols and procedures, and it can kind of make it hard to then go take that exam when your farther removed for more formal education.

And that's something I also want to look into is maybe offering like an online CCSH prep course through the college itself, so that we have more sleep techs with that credential and hopefully build that up and let hospitals and insurance companies see the value in that, especially in long-term patient compliance.

I think it's very valuable to have that education component. So where do you see education, the direction of education going for sleep technology? You've obviously developed one and now you're developing another program.

And so there are changes that have taken place since then versus now. And where do you see it going in terms of education for sleep technologists? I think the need for formal education is there because the patients that they are seeing in the sleep lab are much more complex.

The titrations are a much complex as we get into more of these implantable devices and just different ways to treat patients. Having that education background is going to be really beneficial to them.

They're essentially spending 16 months of learning everything there is to know about the technical side of being a sleep technologist, they come out knowing how to score studies, how look at those different things, decipher research journals and things like that.

the model is moving more towards formal education. It's hard sometimes to get colleges to buy into it because they are expensive programs that are not pumping out 60 students every year.

They are smaller. And so that's where the community really has helped. The community in the Houston area has said, we need tax, are new to the field that aren't you know we have this wave of techs retiring and text that we don't necessarily have the time to train they need to be trained by the Time we get them, so then we can just train them and get him in seeing patients.

So I think the need for formal education. is there and is kind of the way that sleep is moving. It's just kind a slow process like with anything and really getting your community to be supportive of more formal education at the local colleges.

Hey Jordan, one question for you. As the field of sleep has continued to evolve and we know that technology is changing, I'm assuming obviously you teach the fundamentals, right, from a sleep tech perspective, but it's changing so rapidly.

that, you know, and it's one of the things that's really important to me. And I know Emerson has had lots of conversations and presentations about, PPG and PAT technology and cardiopulmonary coupling and all of that.

The new and latest, greatest sort of diagnostic capabilities that are out there today and even endotyping and phenotypying. Is that included in your curriculum today or are you letting it continue to evolve just a little bit more so you can see where it might fit in from an educational perspective?

Yeah, right now it is kind of letting it continue to evolve and as bits and pieces come out, it's definitely touched on. I am big about, hey, let's bring people in who are experts or have done some research in it to explain it from a sleep tech perspective.

The hardest part about being in education is remembering at the end of the day, it's to get them to pass that RPS GT and be an entry level sleep Tech entry-level.

What does that mean? Right? It's kind of going to vary depending on where it is. So I have to kind of weigh how much do I want to expose them to and how do they really need to know just to become a brand new baby sleep tech who can pass that registry.

But I do think it's important to let them know, hey, there are these things out there. Sleep is going to evolve. And that's how you stay in the field.

It's going evolve, you have evolve with it. Keeping that knowledge up is so important. So kind of both a little bit. It just depends on if we can fit it in.

A lot of times I like to have people either virtually talk to the students and do a presentation on those kinds of topics, especially in their last semester, where it's more of just a review of everything so that they know, hey, this is out there and it is coming.

And if they're interested in it, you know that there's different avenues to that way. So to kind touch on that as well as something that you said earlier, All these newer therapies, like you said, the implantables, then the GLP-1 drugs that became big last year, how does that fit into your course and education towards the upcoming sleep techs?

Because as you know, as a night tech, we evolve in there, right? You get asked all these crazy questions by the patients, and they're expected to know everything.

And so how do you prepare them for these kind of newer technologies in therapy? Yeah, so I think a lot of it is just exposure, letting them know what's out there, um, let them do some research on it too from their perspective, right?

Because that's what the patients are going to do. They're going do their own research and comment like, Hey, I

heard about this. Can I, do I qualify for it?

So in teaching them to, where are the reputable sources, how to find good articles or information about these new things that are out there and letting them know it's okay to say, hey, I don't really know, but that's something to talk about when you meet with the doctor.

And letting them know, hey, when you're at clinicals and you are with a seasoned tech, ask them questions throughout the night. You know the 2 a.m. slump when everything is usually going pretty good.

Ask them about it. What exposure do they get at their facility for these newer things? How do you find webinars and going to these conferences and the importance of them?

Teaching Moments and Closing Reflections

not only to get those continued education credits, but to hear about all these brand new technologies and things like that. So it's a balance too, because again, it is a short amount of time.

It doesn't sound like it at the beginning, But once they go through it, It's really quick. And so really teaching those fundamentals too of how to do research, how maybe we do a project on different alternative therapies, what's out there, have them do some research on it.

Cause I think that helps too, for them to be on that patient side as if I was a patient, how would I look this up and find my information? It is that reputable.

And if it's not, you know, do you navigate that? So all of that is really important to build in to their education. Jordan, this has been a lot of fun hearing about your program and your journey.

When you reflect back, over your journey, particularly as an educator. What special moment stands out as one of those that was just a great teaching moment?

Maybe it was an epiphany with a student, but something that always you kind of hold dear as a special moments as educator? Do you have something like that you can share with our audience?

Yeah, so I always love when students reach back out after they graduate or visit, and you can hear all about what they do. We're lucky in that a lot of the past graduates that I've had are now preceptors at the clinical sites.

So it is really amazing to see them now going from the student to that precepter role. But I think the most The thing that sticks with me the most is when the students come in, and they're so overwhelmed with the head measurements, you know, I teach them how to measure the Head and They're like, never gonna get this.

And then you see them in their last semester and their doing it like it's nothing, they are grooving, They have their time down, their hookups are beautiful and clean and quick.

And they graduate and you just see them successful and knowing that you impacted their life in a positive way and gave them that career path is really what sticks with me and and is kind of my why every day of I want to give.

These students, a path and a career and an education that is meaningful because they are paying to be here so I want to give them everything that they can to Be successful in the world of sleep.

So I think that's really the biggest thing that sticks with me as an educator is just watching them from day one. to the end and how they want to quit after measuring ahead and they're like, I'm never going to get this.

I've never gonna be able to put all of the electrodes on. It's taken them two hours, you know, and then they are down to 40 minutes and it's beautiful and perfect at the and and reminding them.

So I always love to have the Last semester students come with the first semester, students, so those students can see, hey, in three more semesters. This will be you and you will, you, will get it.

You will. Be successful. It is overwhelming, but we're here to support you. I am a believer you're not there to fail anyone. foster everything that you can into them so that they are successful.

And that's what we want. We want really successful, well-trained sleep techs in the world. So yeah, as an educator, it's just watching them grow, really.

I've had a lot of special moments with certain students, some international students who've come over to become sleep-techs, and one went back to his home country and started a sleep lab there.

That's amazing to see that, okay, his education with us has now gone global and is in another country. And he's able to share his journey that way too.

Awesome. Jordan, Jerry's getting ready to cut us off. So I have one comment and then I'll let him do that. But I just wanted to make sure that it is required as part of the curriculum that your sleep techs listen to Sleep Tech Talk every other week.

Yes. I will make it a requirement. There's some really great episodes. They need to, yeah. Well, we like them anyway. We like him. And we listen to them.

Hey, that's awesome. Even though we don't like listening to ourselves, but we still listen all the episodes of Sleep Tech Talk and just as all sleep tech should.

But Jordan, this has been absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much for joining us. It's been a great, great conversation. and thank you for all your contributions in bringing in new sleep technologists to the world.

Yes, thank you for having me. I really enjoyed it. Thank you so much. And folks out there, thank you all so, much for joining us again, and thank for all the likes, the subscriptions, as well as the shares, most importantly the share.

Continue to share it out to all sleep techs out, there and all asleep curious. Be sure to check out the sponsors because without them, we can't do this.

Thank so you much, a huge shout out our sponsors. With that folks, say thank so so and lights on. Before we go, would like to thank our sponsor, MedBridge Healthcare.

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All right, man, that was quite a show. Yeah, it was Jerry. What a journey. I mean to go from thinking you're going to have a career in dancing. to sleep and then the evolution of, with the program, program goes away, you have to reinvent yourself over and over.

What a great story of resiliency, innovation and determination to really land where she is now and clearly how she closed of impacting lives and seeing sleep technologists really grow and thrive in the field, becoming educators themselves is quite an achievement.

Watching her light up when you asked that question about what are some of the special moments. You can tell she is somebody that truly truly enjoys educating her students and watching them evolve and watch them grow.

And we need more people like this in the field. First of all, there's a shortage of sleep technologists, but we needed

people that are dedicated and that really want to see sleep technologies grow and thrive.

Absolutely. And, you know, it's funny, I did ask her a little bit of a baited question when I asked her about, how do you introduce all this new technology and that sort of thing, because I was hoping that she would do exactly what she said, which is we're continuing to evaluate, let it all, These technological advances, you know, continue to develop and really stay focused on the basics and get these these students through the initial process of getting their RPS GT and and you're you what somewhat really prepared for CCSH pretty quickly afterwards.

So, from a. an education standpoint, I think it's the right approach. And, you know, they'll get to hear more about all of those latest, all the latest technologies and things in the future at some point, but ultimately they have to know the foundation of the field.

I Think that's a challenge, right? You know new technologies come and many of them go, then we We've heard of so many that have come and gone. And so how do you incorporate all that into a full-blown educational program?

And I think that's a challenge. I also like the fact, though, she encouraged technologists to do their own research also, and how to the research. Where are the right places to go for this?

Because every influencer out there is now Now a sleep specialist, right? Mouth tape anyone? So… Right? How about the word piezo? We don't use the words pieizo anymore.

There you go. Zeitgeber. Where are these words these days? That's right. Pen and ink. Oh guys, so… Yeah, I think it was a great episode. I'm looking forward to more folks like this and looking for more technologists.

With that being said, folks out there that are listening, if there's a technologist that you believe should be on the show, don't hesitate to reach out to us and offer their name up.

And they just may be a guest on this show. All right, you guys ready to call it? Let's do it. Thank you. All right. Thank you, everyone. Until next time, cheers.