Inside the Growth of Functional Medicine Transcript

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Opening on IFM growth and practitioner diversity

If you look at our stage and you at the diversity of our practitioners, it's amazing. It says that we are part of the fabric of healthcare. We're not part a single angle of it, we're part the of fabric healthcare, and that's what we seeing with all the people coming through our registrations and our programs are off the charts.

Yeah. Were over 100%, oversubscribed. More and more people want to learn about it and take it back to wherever they are practicing. Hello and welcome back to the Evolution of Medicine podcast.

We are here at the Institute for Functional Medicine's annual international conference. Thank you so much. Great to see you again and great to be here.

We'll be starting off this series by just asking about the journey that brought you here to me here at your tenure with IFM and now kicking off the conference.

Tell us a little bit about that journey for people who don't know you. Yeah. Oh, great.

Journey into nonprofit leadership and IFM

Well, I actually love to answer that question because I do not have a straight journey to being in medicine, but I have straight a journey into being a nonprofit work.

And I think most people know, not everyone, that IFM is a non-profit and our work is mission-driven at the core. So my journey really started in city government and started helping people being service minded and quickly turned into youth development nonprofit work.

Again, mission driven about helping young people to find their path. And I was sort of on that youth mission journey and I interviewed by a recruiting firm that was looking for somebody to come and bring a mission service oriented way of thinking to IFM as a nonprofit.

So I started the work sort with the idea that I would perhaps become the CEO, which happened pretty quickly. And the rest is history, I guess. What was it about the mission that captured you?

So my dad was a gastroenterologist. And about the time that I was interviewing for this job, we knew that he had cognitive decline, Alzheimer's cognitive, decline.

I don't think that we know definitely Alzheimer, but it was not good. He had served and really thought a lot about diet as a Gastro enterologist, so that actually sort of felt…

That's unusual. Yeah, it is totally unusual, he was talking to people about gluten-free diets. Wow. He would have just turned 89 years old. That would've been early, early adoption.

But the thing that I had watched that was most compelling to me was that, I watched him have a solo practice and then grow his practice, but the drag down about the business side of what he was trying to do and losing touch with the healing side.

His deep desire to simply be helping people get better. And it wasn't about wanting to do an endoscopy on them. It was about, wanting, to talk with them about what it was that was in their life that, was difficult and hard that might be driving their stress, that may be, driving the way they felt.

So he was talking about functional medicine. He didn't know it as that. Yeah. But he's talking, about it. And we

didn't eat dinner until nine o'clock at night, because we waited until he came home.

And then at the dinner table, we talked about what he had been doing all day. Not HIPAA things, but what had he been going all-day. When he passed, one of the things that was so, well, it just spoke to my dad and who he was, is the person who had helped him with his finances for years in his practice said, did you know about the drawer?

And I did know the about drawer. The drawer was where people that couldn't pay their bills That's where their cards were. And he kept seeing the patients because it was important to him to be reaching everybody.

Amazing. Yeah. How do you feel that that story ends up playing into the job in front of us here at Functional Medicine? So when I started at IFM, I think the mission was the same, right?

It was a widespread option of functional medicine. But at the time, It was really focused on how people could use discretionary funds in order to have a functional medicine clinician.

Mission, access, and functional medicine for everyone

And I distinctly remember in March of 2018, staff retreat, we're all sitting in Federal Way, Washington. The thing that kept coming up over and over was that we wanted to be about driving functional medicines to everyone.

It couldn't just be for somebody that had discretionary funds. We had to be building a structure that allowed for us to allowing access to functional medicine for practitioners who wanted to trained in it and for patients who want to treated under that discipline.

If you fast-forge where we are today and what we're hearing at the conference and we see on the stage. We're doing that. And that feels true and authentic to what Susan and Jeff Bland had in mind in the beginning.

They wanted anyone who could learn about it, and they wanted widespread adoption. Widespread adoption means everybody. Doesn't mean just a few. I was interested in what Dr.

Bland said in the session that we just saw. We were sitting kind of close to each other. I think it would be hard to imagine in in 80s how personalization of personalisation medicine could reach the masses.

But part of what I thing has been amazing of the functional medicine movement has being the sort of emergent nature of it, right? innovation has led to the opportunity to see what's possible.

And I think that that's sort of coming around now to a point where if you look at the things that are most exciting, it is making into places where it hasn't been.

Yes. Yeah. It absolutely is. Here at at The Conference, we have people serving in so many different practice types. Our last immune module, about 35% of the attendees were in solo practice.

That's actually smaller than we would have had in the past. 40% of them, people can select two categories, but 40 percent of the were in group practice, so 2 to 10 plus, if you want to have that spread.

The other 40, 42 percent, institutions. Wow. So that's our immune module, right? And our breakdown of people who are practicing, about half, 50% of attendees, MDDO, nurse practitioners, growing percentage, nutrition professionals, NDs, chiropractors, dentists.

We have 20 different licensure types that are coming through the programs. People want to be they want to be practicing functional medicine within the license that they hold and they wanna be able to provide just deeper thinking, deeper meaningful contact and support for their patients.

It's interesting that the term longevity has captured so many people and yet you could consider that it's almost like the widespread adoption of functional medicines because what's the best way to live for a long time and not get a

chronic illness?

That's really true. I think that's true or figure out a way reliefs your cell phone. Yeah, exactly. Well, look, I was looking at the impact report and we sent it out to our practitioners a few months ago when it came out.

But the key thing that I saw was that over six figures, 100,000 more practitioners have taken training. There's something about like those kind of numbers swelling, that gives everyone a sense of confidence that This is happening, it's growing, the acceleration is making it into more places.

What were some things from the impact report that were interesting to you? So I just want to take a minute to talk about the incredible mission partners that we have here at the Evolution of Medicine that have made this possible.

So first and foremost, I want thank. Fullscript and Full script journey. So Full scripts been an amazing partner for 10 years. We only pick partners that can help us achieve our vision and help you achieve your practice vision.

Impact report, partners, and certification standards

And Full Script have been incredible partner, for a decade, but their new offering journeys, this is why we called it the Evolution of Medicine Journeys, is allowing practitioners to combine the relationships that they have with the newest technology to sell direct to consumer lab testing and use it as a funnel to bring into your practices.

It's a game changer for the whole industry. So go to goevomed.com slash journeys and you can get started on building the journeys for your practice an optimal way into your practise.

We're gonna have some conversations about it. This is a game changer. Next, Genova. Genoa have been fans of the Evolution of Medicine for a long time.

we're big fans them and they now have a lot more specialty testing. They have lot of more tools and it's a key part of at understanding the body ecologically.

So go to goeomed.com slash genova to find out more. Come on over here. I want to show you about the other mission partners. You know, if you'd be following us for a while, you know that these are organizations that we trust to add a lot of value.

Freedom practice coaching. Um, I have been supported by them since the beginning and You know, so many of the issues that practitioners face in building a successful practice, scaling a successfully practice come down to having the right support with people who have been there and done that.

Go to goevomed.com slash FPC, big boost marketing. Uli and his team are the best in the business when it comes to really understanding how to market your functional medicine practice.

Go to goevomed.com slash big boost and see how they can help you. And then what you're going to be hearing a lot about is the formation of clinical networks.

Ultimately, True Neura is our first effort at that, which is to build an integrated clinical network combining independent practices from across the country into a network that can reverse cognitive decline.

And if you go to goevomed.com slash Trinura, you can get a demo. You can see what it means to be part of an integrative clinical networks. That's mentorship, that's software, and that makes it easier for you to get incredible outcomes in a disease state where there are no other options.

So thanks to our mission partners. Let's get back to the content. Yeah, so I think if you think about the hundred thousand plus, that's certainly one thing.

If you about 2.3 million hits to the Find a Practitioner page, That's absolutely something else. The certification work

that we're doing, which is highlighted in the report and something we are talking about so much, I think is another really important nugget between those two things.

Because somebody learning functional medicine, getting certified in functional and then being on a find a practitioner page where people are looking to find the functional practitioner, that through line should be somebody that has the competencies and skills to provide good functional medicine care.

And I'm not saying that has to be IFM. I am just saying good, functional, medicine, care, the hard part about it is the number of mentions of functional medical care that you or I would not define as functional care and that's a challenge for us.

It's exciting that it's mentioned so often and yet people not really practicing functional and saying their functional is not helpful. What is the cost of the sort of emergent way of doing it, right?

If you control it you can make sure that people do it a certain way but it doesn't blossom maybe in the same ways it has so there's obviously upsides and downsides to that.

Do you have any like insight as to what you think can solve that problem or is it just a problem we have to live with? No, I think there's a couple of things we can do.

I, think it's really important for you and IFM and others who hold a set of standards for what they define to be functional medicine, keep defining it and keep saying this is and that's not.

Like, i think its okay for us to say it. We should be super proud of what it is that we're doing. Really important. I think the functional medicine certification is probably one of the single most important things that we will do under the International Board of Functional Medicine Certification to really be able to set the standard for what it means to be functional-medicine trained.

And, you know, we've had a great certification program at IFM, and we have trained nearly 3,000 people and had them go through the program, they are well trained.

The new program is the next version of that truth. Under the new programs, there are competencies that align with the degree that you hold. anyone eventually that has been trained in functional medicine and the training meets a certain criteria can come through that program.

That is a way of us lifting up a functional medication certification that is available to more and doesn't look like six or seven or eight different certifications where people can't actually discern what's good and what bad, right?

And that's gonna be the hard part because We could feel really sort of competitive in that space of education and functional medicine and who does it better.

It doesn't actually serve us. What serves us is training people to the competencies. If we can do it and other organizations can also do, that's good because what we need is just more trained practitioners.

Every organization that we meet with, like a large institution that's practicing functional medicine, Cleveland Clinic, Ohio State's getting ready to have a really big program, they all have waitlists, huge waitlist.

And what does that mean? Well, it means we need more competent practitioners, right? And it mean the growing interest, off the charts good. Yeah, one of the things I've noticed over the last decade is that there's the least friction in someone just being beside or reading something, watching something and being like, I want to do this for myself.

There's a little bit less friction with a doctor or a practitioner being, like well, this makes sense to me. I'm going to go and do it. But that institutional friction is the hardest to sort of break down.

So I feel like it's good sign when organizations are getting over their own. self-limitation, not understanding what it

is, having varied experiences with it in the marketplace, in town, just as you're saying, and coming to a point where they can go, no, this actually makes a lot of sense and we need to do this if we want to really tackle chronic illness.

Yeah, I think so too. And, you know, one of the things that IFM, when I started, it's nine years. I can't believe it. It's 9 years, June 21st. Yeah.

Research standards, truth in AI, and conference highlights

When I started, there was a feeling of we don't want to drive too much patient interest because we do not have enough practitioners to be able to meet the need.

And that was the push pedal at the time. Really? We want as many people that want it as possible because we need them saying to everyone that they want to.

We need to help them understand what it is they wants. So I don't know if you saw the video that we showed in the opening. More of that. where somebody can easily digest what functional medicine is, what it truly is feels critically important.

What you do feels critical important, again, all of us speaking to it in a way that is understandable and that feels aligned, just feels pretty cool. Totally.

Well, I wanted to check in on a couple of things I think that happened in the last year that I thought were really, really interesting and conversations we've had.

And, you know, to the point of your father and my father, the fact that six doctors trained by IFM, certified by AFM have taken a standard of care forward to showcase, at least in their beginning year, that the reversal of cognitive decline and getting into Alzheimer's is possible feels like a big deal because the methodology was you know, identify and remove the causes as you see fit, which is basically like the functional medicine methodology and building on the foundation and so forth.

So it's cool for me because I feel like it there's been, it is the beginning of what I see is, is proof of the. system, as opposed to proof of parts of the system.

And I think that's going to be mission critical to convince the rest of world that has too much friction to believe, or hasn't seen it for themselves, hasn' experienced it themselves that this is the way that we need to treat chronic illness.

It's really exciting and I would say that it's a testament to the education that all of those doctors were trained here. I'm so excited about that. I am also excited the research tools that we have built.

So I know Christine Burke falls into this, right? And she worked on the standards development around clinical patient care standards. that we worked on.

She worked with us on the building of that. We were having a conversation last night and I was talking with her about that and then I said, and remember, we actually put the research standards together too and they're available on website and she's like, right, I'm gonna be using those.

That's the kind of thing that need. If we have a set of standards that define what is functional medicine research and we align with a few things are musts and here's other things that are really important, Then we start to build that strong base.

And so it isn't just the bits and pieces that we can piece together and show we think this works. We know there's so much more than that. It is about building alignment around common ground for research, for patient care, the competencies, education standards.

All of that's critically important. Well, part of holism is that it's more than the sum of the parts, right? And so you can measure the part, but measuring the full effect, I think we all intuitively know that this is really powerful.

But to actually, you know, see it come out in the literature is a big next step. So great. The other thing, which is, a little bit tongue in cheek, about like the grokopedia entry.

What a joy. So just for those who don't know, it's been a thorn in the side of functional medicine to have this Wikipedia page that just sits there full of falsehoods, never being updated, impossible to update.

And now here comes along Grokopedia. As soon as I heard that it existed, I put it in functional. I saw what it said, and I sent it to you, sent to Jeff, And I was like, hallelujah.

Yeah, right. We were all like what's Grokkopedia? But here's the great thing. Now, it's, what is functional medicine on CHAT-GTP? What is Functional Medicine on Gemini?

And IFM comes up as global leader. We've worked really hard to ensure that that happens, but the definitions are aligned. Aligned. Right? Unreal. And they're aligned because they are real, right?

There's a certain wonderfulness about things being true. Yeah, exactly. No, Grokopedia was amazing, and that was such a great moment. I really enjoyed, you know, I, really feel like, well, my mom would always say, the truth will out, right?

And eventually, systems come that are available to actually, extract that truth and deliver it. Well, tell me a little bit about, what you've seen this weekend that you think for those people who haven't made it here, and what they've missed and, uh, your thoughts are about the future.

Yeah. So, you know, we started the conference, I think, in a really powerful way. We started it by sort of getting to the center of the matrix, to mind-body-spirit side of what it is that we do.

And that's powerful all the time, but it feels particularly powerful and palpable right now because everybody's under stress of some variety and some kind, right?

Everybody is. And so finding ways to have joy, finding way to share connection, we know is critically important. So just sort of starting with that energy was great.

To have speakers on the stage that are talking about how functional medicine is being applied in, you know, homeless people. to Have functional Medicine being shown by James Carter talking cardiology, and we've been teaching that in our modules, but to have James Carter from Cleveland Clinic talking about it as he's applying to the Center for Functional Medicine at Cleveland clinic on the stage here, that's a big deal.

I think each time we show it happening in a space that people can understand, like Cleveland like someone that does not have a home, we can see real people instead of, I've been scanned from top to bottom and these are the things that were found and now I'm trying to figure out a path.

These people are just suffering from chronic illness, right? That's powerful. The people that are coming up to me and saying they love it that they're here, the thing they are saying most is, I can see myself practicing this.

And these are people who are new. 50% of the audience has not been to an AIC, 25% has never been into an IFM program. Yeah, well, on the first day, there was a session just over there that was for the people who hadn't come before.

And I walked in, I was like, this is massive. It was great to see how many new people had showed up. Right. One more thing that I'll add, because you and I have talked about this quite a bit, and we talked a lot about it during COVID, if you look at our stage and you at the diversity of our practitioners, it's amazing.

Global expansion, Japan, and future collaboration

Yeah. It says that we are part of the fabric of healthcare. We're not part a single angle of it, we're part the of fabric healthcare, and that's what we see with all the people coming through our programs.

Our registrations in our program are off the charts. Over a hundred percent. Oversubscribe, oversubscribe. More and more people want to learn about it and take it back to wherever they are practicing.

in any way, form that they can and in a number, again, I've said it before, but a numbers of different types of licensure. My favorite thing about AIC compared to other conferences is just the international nature of it.

So I could say Argentina and Brazil, Japan, that's just people that I met and I have been doing this mostly. It's been amazing to see that and just the interest and obviously it'll come with its own challenges to take back to the country and sort of build the ecosystem from scratch because when you want to learn how to assess function, then you're going to have to think about it.

One of the conversations we had today was actually with a doctor that wants to bring functional medicine to Japan. We had a great meeting with the team today and I was just thinking about the fact that we don't have to bring American functional medicine to Japan.

Japanese functional medicines could actually have its own flavor, its' own ways of assessing function, and actually, I think, maybe send something back in this direction.

Completely. And so one of the things that I intend to do this year is to take a delegation of people from here over to japan because in the same way that, you know, a Japanese doctor might love a session from Michael Stone on doing an amazing physical, like there may be things that they could teach us about how we assess function without this lab test.

How do we restore function, without their supplement, but actually to create a more like culturally cohesive delivery system for understanding the body through the context of function.

Right. Absolutely. No question about that. If we shut ourselves off from learning what they're doing and how can improve and continue to grow. Yeah. and something's working in public health there because everyone leads to 90 years old.

So we wanted to learn about that. And it was interesting to see that the specific science of what's happening here is exciting and palatable to them too.

It's something that they're missing, which I thought was a really great way of seeing the mutual value of What's Happening and a pathway towards the emerging truth that is the way that body works and how to heal it.

We're getting There's so many great speakers still to come. So I know you talked with Gail earlier, her talk's going to be amazing. It's really going be powerful.

And we have so much good people. Yeah. Well, it's a great thing. I guess the last thing I want to share, I witnessed something yesterday that I didn't think I'd witnessed.

Like I think shared with you before that when I went to the Mexican Association of Lifestyle Medicine, that the conference was the medicine and that, when they played the music in between the sessions, people danced like it was a party on Saturday night, but at nine in the morning.

I said to Geeta yesterday when I was interviewing her that however she set it up, she achieved that. And that energy was really palpable in getting people to sort of be in the medicine.

Yes. I felt like that was good because when it had been tried at previous times, it was a little bit stiff, I would say.

Conference energy and closing reflections

You wouldn't want to try it. No. It was such a beautiful way to start. She was amazing. We were so excited about her coming. Well, look, this has been a wonderful experience so far and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

You know, we've been limited over the last 10 years to a show, right? A show that we made that was an hour and we'd speak to three people and a few other people.

This is wonderful because I think we're able to capture a much broader and richer experience of what's happening here. I hope there's something we can do again.

I hope so, too. And this is amazing. I mean, you're loving it, right? Yeah. Loving it. Yeah, I've got a good spot. There's a lot of action here today, but I hear that AI is unbelievably good at getting out of the background noise, so you can hear us very well.

A good way to use AI. Exactly. Thank you, Amy. All right. So we are here asking practitioners about their practitioner journeys and the reason why is because journeys is a new product from Fullscript.

Journeys allows you to set up your own lab offerings as the top of the funnel, give the patients what they want, they wanna know about themselves and it's the easiest way to bring them into your practice.

We have all types of practices from across the country that are building their own unique lab panels for their unique practices selling them to their community and acting as a great funnel into their practice.

This is a massive innovation. I think this will accelerate the evolution of medicine. You can go to goevomed.com slash journeys to find out more, set up your own journeys in half an hour and transform the health of your community.

Go get them. So that was the podcast. What an epic session. Thank you so much for tuning in to the Evolution of Medicine podcast, we'll be back again next week and thanks so