Joy in Medicine: How Physicians Can Find Meaning Beyond Burnout Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Welcome

You know, we live in a moment in time that's even more exaggerated in this realm of like present, present present. So there is a beautiful facade that we dress up every day and that take to work.

And we don't necessarily feel as together as we often look. You don' know from how great somebody looks how cluttered their house is or how filthy their closet is, or like how far behind they are on the dishes at home.

More patients, more authority, and more freedom. I'm Brett Gregory, founder of Doctor Talks, where we're democratizing the creator economy for doctors.

Welcome to the show. Welcome to the Doctor Talks podcast. I'm your host, Brett Gregory, where we are democratizing the creator economy for doctors. And I am really excited about our interview today.

We have Dr. Chrissy Ott, who I had the pleasure of being on her podcast, Solving for Joy recently, we had such a really exciting, interesting conversation.

and I was so excited to bring her to you. She's got so much great coaching insights and wisdom and gift for physicians. and I'm really excited to have you here today.

Dr. Chris Yacht, welcome to the Doctor Talks podcast. Thank you so much, Brett. Thanks for having me. It's fun to do a podcast swap with you. Yes, thanks so for being here.

So tell us a little bit about who you are and how you help doctors. Absolutely. So I'm Chrissy Ott, I am board certified physician in internal medicine, pediatrics, integrative medicine and most recently obesity medicine.

Wow. I have worked in primary care as a hospitalist and I m currently the medical director of a long-term care facility for medically complex children.

And I actually have to take a breath in the midst of saying that because it's too many words. Yes. So wait, did I get that right? Are you triple board certified?

I was trying to count. It's quadruple. A quadruple. Okay. Yes, wow. Amazing. Quadrupole board certify. And you're the founder of JoyPoint Solutions. Yes, I have also been a wellbeing activist since my first year of medical school on behalf of my fellow trainees.

Dr. Chrissy Ott's Background and Coaching Work

I did some wellness work in residency and ended up leading wellbeing work at my hospital years ago, which led to a massive coaching initiative where we got 300 medical staff members through a 12-week coaching program.

where they received individual coaching successions. They received small group coaching and they receive some didactic learning around like how to not believe every thought you have.

And this was so life changing for these people that I knew immediately, I am also needing to coach. This is part of my work in the world that healing does not end in an exam room or in a hospital room, but I actually want to help lift up our healers, especially in U. S.

healthcare system, which, you know, like many healthcare systems but especially ours suffers from so many dreadful shortcomings. Oh, yes. Yeah, I was so excited when I met you and heard about what you're doing.

You know, doctors, and I've always had a soft spot for doctors. My dad was a doctor and, you know I always really wanted to help doctors as much as I could.

And my gift is in marketing and sales. So I try as as can to lift up doctors and feel like doctors have been so unfairly squeezed from so many different directions.

and it's time for us to give back to doctors. And so I was so excited to hear what you've been doing. So tell me, how do you help doctors? Well, you know, as you were speaking, one of the things I thinking about was also how I've helped by doctors and how have been disappointed in doctors over the years as a patient, which is not the majority of my experience, but I'm really a sensitive consumer of healthcare.

I am an exquisitely sensitive consumer of healthcare, I always have been. I can tell when I'm being treated like a number. And so as part of responding to not wanting to replicate that kind of medicine, for eight years I had a solo micro practice where it was just me.

It was like the polar opposite of that, like maybe too far with the pendulum because we can't meet the volume needs that way. But what I hope is that there is more humanity in medicine, both for the physician to feel their full human self in the room and for patient to that.

And when we are moving at the pace of medicine today, there's so little room to drop into your body and have a human connection because you are multitasking at an extraordinarily high level.

So the way I help doctors in response to that is hopefully helping them connect more deeply to their own inner voice so that their creative wisdom, their knowing their actual own value set that isn't just the system or the organization's value-set can come on board and they can realign with what feels most important to them.

Because as you know, at the end of a life, what matters most is did you actually stay true to the values that you count as most precious? Yeah, I love that.

That was so well said. So let's talk about why do so many high achieving doctors, especially women, look successful on the outside and still feel disconnected on It's a bit of an epidemic of this, I'm afraid.

Helping Doctors Reconnect with Values and Humanity

I think that, you know, we live in a moment in time that's even more exaggerated in this realm of like present, present present. So there is a beautiful facade that we dress up every day and that take to work.

And we don't necessarily feel as together as we often look. know. You don't know from how great somebody looks how cluttered their house is or how filthy their closet is, or like how far behind they are on the dishes at home.

Just like take it into the home, but if you were in the room with your physician, you have no idea if they just got a call five seconds ago that their little one skinned their knee at school or is having an anaphylactic reaction to something and the other parents had to go take care of it, but they're there to take of your child's, you know, ear infection or fill in the blank, right?

So we don't share transparently in our culture, especially as medical professionals. And I'm not saying that we need to share transparency, I think we should check in with ourselves.

We've gotten so habituated to not sharing transpareantly with the outer world that forgot to keep sharing with our selves inwardly. And that takes intentional time out of time, like designated self-reflection time whether you call it meditation or you do it on a walk or do you it in a journal or have a special relationship in your life like a therapist or a coach or mentor.

where you actually get to explore, how am I really? How am actually feeling? Am I spending more time neutral to positive or more neutral time to negative?

And what does that call to action for me? And how, when you're coaching doctors, how do you actually, what do ask them to look, ask themselves, or how you do actually take that to the next step?

People come into coaching, especially physicians, from a variety of points. A lot of people come with a complaint of burnout, but not everybody. Some people say, I'm not burned out, But I also don't know how to retire.

Or I still love medicine but I have a sense that it's not treating me well right now. I need to negotiate a contract and I don' know to speak up for myself because I've been trained to not value my work.

So people come from all these different angles and I think a big part of it is building a mind map so that they can see their own thoughts out on paper or like in the ether, you know, a little bit.

And then also to do a self inventory of awareness of your own values. Again, it's so much about what values am I serving? Is efficiency the value that I want to put forth in my life or is it connection?

and where are they actually counterposed? Can I serve some efficiency and some connection in a way that makes me feel good in my own nervous system and consistent with my personal mission?

I love to take people on a journey of personal missions. In one of my group offerings, we do a personal-mission statement that grows out of our values.

it grows out of the verbs that we actually want to do. Some people want a teach, some people wanna practice, Some People wanna write, speak, I mean, you name it, right?

And then also like, what are the vibes you wanna feel while you're doing it? You know, it goes on, there's a little bit more of a framework, but when you actually take that, those like columns of information and weave them together into a personal mission statement, It is so exciting to be like oh my gosh, this is a through line.

for my life. This makes sense of the past and it makes since of my present or why I'm not actually vibing so well with my current work situation or life partner, you know.

I mean, sometimes it's about just becoming aware that things are no longer workable and you need a switch. You need to change something inwardly or externally.

Yeah. So how do you help doctors come up with their own personal mission statement and do have any examples? I'd love to, when you hear that, I was like, oh my goodness, Oh my gosh, I can pull one up.

I would love to hear one. While you're pulling it up, tell us how do you help them create a personal mission statement? What's that process? Well, yeah, we have some roots that say, you know, may I be, like that's kind of a way to start or may is a good start, or I'm here to.

like it's a declaration of what your purpose on the planet is. So verbs, values, vibes, and vision. It includes also a vision for yourself and sometimes for the world.

They may sound sometimes grandiose, but we're speaking to our vision for the big world.

Personal Mission Statements and Decision-Making

So here's one from an early client. May I continue to be an expression of love in all that I do professionally and personally? Oh, I love that. Isn't that beautiful?

That is great. When you've actually landed on a mission statement, you can feel it. It's like it clicks into place. And if you're not quite there with the words, You sort of feel around until you like, Oh yeah, that's it, That's the one.

Yeah. Here's one. My mission is to impact the world through my leadership, assisting others in their journey of

healing and transformation. Ooh, I love that too.

Yeah, have always had my mission statements as part of my business. So Doctor Talks, our mission is to help a billion people suffering from chronic illness and disease.

And at the flip side of that, it's democratizing the creative economy for doctors. That to me, like it resonates to, me but certainly on a business level as opposed, but I really like the personal mission statement.

I think that could be very motivating. How has that changed anybody's life? It has changed people's lives. Yeah. It becomes an anchoring touchstone and they can say, okay, well here is a new opportunity.

Does it make sense when I hold it up next to my personal mission statement? Is there a way that it makes sense for me when I hold it up to my personal mission statement?

And if the answer is yes, then you go to the next step of evaluating. And then if answer's like, no, it really doesn't, you know, maybe you let it go.

Yeah, that's so important because it's taken me 50 years to learn how to say no to opportunities. It's amazing how freeing it is and how much you can thrive, how more you could thrive when you learn to how say, no.

And having a personal mission statement is just like instant clarity. It really is. I have another fun step that your listeners will enjoy, which is a decision-making framework that comes out of delight.

So, as you know from being on my podcast, I think of joy as the convergence of meaning, alignment, and delight, they are all So I want a life with purpose that means something important to me.

That's where meaning comes from. So that's the importance of mission. Alignment is about values. And delight is because we should delight in our lives.

We should delight in one another. Delight our circumstances whenever and however it's possible, right? So the first step in this decision-making framework is does it delight me?

Ooh, I like that. Yes. Do I have time and space for it right now? I like it. Does it align, like am I aligned with it, which is kind of a callback to the personal mission statement or value set?

Do i agree with what it costs me? So thinking opportunity cost. And finally, do I agree what costs others? Ah. Yeah, because it could be great for your career, but not so great your family.

Yeah. I think that's lovely. Okay. Does it delight me? Is it aligned? Do I have time for it? I agree with it. What does it cost me, what does cause others?

Yeah, and delight is that sense of like being lit up from the inside. It's an excitement and a yes in your body. Yeah. And some coach long ago early on in my journey taught me if it's not a hell yes, it should be a Hell no.

Right. That's so true. I love how you're anchored to joy. of course, founder of JoyPoint Solutions. So tell me about Joy, can Joy actually change what happens in the body and not just the mind?

For me, it's a solid yes. I think that when we connect to actual joy, which, you know, does not get rid of the fact that there are sorrows in the world.

In fact, when you're deeply rooted to meaning alignment and delight, there's room for sorrow to coexist, right? So when were connected to that, There's also a thread that I thing corresponds to awe, that feeling of being part of something bigger, being smaller than something, having a holy vision or witnessing of something sacred, all of that together.

It's kind of like when you just are in the slipstream. You're like, yes, I'm where I need to be. Even if this is a hard day or a heart moment, it's still a yes.

Yeah, that's great. So I think that it changes our neurobiology, absolutely. I don't want to get way off mainstream here, but we are energy systems, right?

And so we're tuning in to different frequencies in and out of every interaction, in an out every day. And when you feel that flow, like you said, you are in some coherence, maybe heart-mind coherance, right?

Like your energy body is actually emitting a different frequency and that changes how we do our biology. It changes, how do we everything. So yes, I think it matters My role in the world is not to trot out their research for that.

I honor the research and I think it's fascinating. But my role is actually to get my hands in there and be with people and talk about it, make it operational.

Yeah. So what led you to connect joy with medicine in first place? Well, I think that it goes all the way back to when I was 17 and my best friend's mom did my animal cards for the first time.

Joy, Neurobiology, and the Origins of JoyPoint

I didn't predict I'd talk about that on today's show, but yeah, she was kind of like into new age things and I interested and, you know, cool adults sharing things with me.

And we did this, like, it's a tarot-like card. You pick cards and you have an animal to the north and the south and west and east, inner, outer, low and above.

So the inner animal for me was the hummingbird. Hmm. Hummingbird medicine is largely about joy. Okay. I mean, hummingbirds are easy to connect with. Who doesn't love a hummingbird?

Like, something's wrong with you if you're not in love with humming birds. But the humming bird medicine really spoke to me. And I think that I really like imprinted that perspective that joy would continue to be important in my life.

I didn't make it so operationalized until I came up with JoyPoint solutions and realized that we're looking backwards. Yeah, it was an absence of joy that caused me to leave a marriage.

It was in absence joy. That caused to me leave medical practice. Absence of Joy that cause me make changes in my life that were kind of unscripted, unpredictable, but really life-affirming.

And wow, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And so with helping doctors, so let's say doctors who don't have a lotta joy in their current practice, why do guilt, self-judgment, and burnout keep so many physicians from thriving even when they're doing everything right?

They are doing so may things. short answer is that we become imprisoned by our habitual thoughts. And many of our habitual thoughts, the thoughts and beliefs that practice, so a practice thought basically becomes a belief and a beliefs set starts to narrow your flexibility in reality, right?

we begin to practice the thoughts and beliefs of our culture, including the microculture of medicine. So we forget that other thoughts are even possible because what we can see is the inside of a clinic or the insight of hospital or our small set of friends who are doing medicine in similar ways.

And it's not until something comes in to interrupt that limitation that a whole world becomes available. Like something bursts through the black and white and we see in color again.

So I think that it's really about which thoughts are we invested in and do we even see a possibility to change our reality. And so how do you help what interrupts and change reality to a joyful state?

You know, cataclysmic change is a big facilitator. So, Cataclismic Change in the form of getting written up for inappropriate behavior at work. That's how a lot of people find coaching.

It's an awakening. When they have to go to a peer review committee because of Behaviors that's a thing like people do or because they just can't do it anymore You know, they realize they have a health crisis or they a relational crisis So it's not always that dramatic but that awareness comes upon you one way or yet This is no longer working.

Something must change, you know Yeah How have the systems, because when we started out, you started talking about your interactions with doctors have been mostly good, but sometimes not so good.

And so that's the system for the patients. The systems for doctors seem daunting in a lot of different systems. What can doctors do about that? When you say systems, are you thinking about systems of support or like the systems that our work is anchored in?

I think the system that the work has anchors in. I mean, the systems the work is anchored in are kind of like an unforgiving maze, really. I think that's how the insurance and payment structure system is set up.

violent situation where the abused stays with the abuser for the sake of the children, which are the patients because they have a limiting belief that without this steady paycheck or in a different situation, the kids might be worse off.

And so we stay until we don't, until something breaks and we leave medicine sometimes completely instead of getting help.

Burnout, Systems, and Physician Mental Health Support

That makes my heart sad, even though it represents freedom from suffering for some of those individuals. No judgment, good job surviving. Yeah, the systems are there.

There are places where we have important protections, growing protections. I'm an ambassador for the Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation and the LORNA BREEN Act is up for renewal in Congress right now, which is to safeguard licensure in states across the country when physicians and clinicians seek mental health care.

It was named after Dr. Lorna Breen, who's a physician that died by suicide in the pandemic years. And she was a bright emergency medicine physician working in New York City during the worst of the And her mental health crisis was exacerbated by her COVID.

And she didn't seek help because, like many, she feared seeing a psychiatrist or a therapist would be something she had to report on her license forever.

And then wouldn't get hired and then catastrophic thinking errors happen. And, then we, you know, obviate where we would have taken action to get help.

We're like, nope, that's not a possibility for me because my brain told me that bad things will happen if I do this, if i get helped, right? So there are systems of support where, Psychologists are available psychiatrist available there's a physician doctor support line as well there is lots of resource out there and increasingly we don't have there not reality anymore to most states having a reportable difficulty when when physicians simply seek mental health care.

Yeah. Yeah, it makes a ton of sense. I hope those resources remain available and become more easily available. Amen. Let's talk a little bit about, so you still have a medical practice.

You're not only a founder of JoyPoint Solutions, but you have still a Medical Practice. How has your Medical practice changed as you paid more attention to joy, meaning, and emotional well-being?

Well, the arc of my medical practice changes might give you whiplash, but I really thought I would be primary care my whole life long. That's what was in my bones, and I'd be practicing integrative primary-care forever.

I started off in a really traditional clinic and hated it for a lot of reasons. It was not a good fit for me, I didn't have words for burnout, had absolutely no idea that a physician could have a coach.

Like, what? It wouldn't have computed at the time. So I moved from that practice because I did not enjoy it to the solo micro practice. And then I was there and I realized I'm kind of burned out on being a business owner and miss critically ill patients.

I sort of hybridized and did hospital work and my solo practice And then I had a child after many years of trying to have a children and realized that the business owning was sucking away too much of my precious time with my toddler.

So I transitioned to doing only hospital medicine. And I appreciate being an employee of an organization. Having been a business owner, I can see the benefits.

And as somebody who doesn't like ever being told what to do, it's difficult to be part of a large corporate medical structure. Of course. So I just try to keep switching variables to where I have maximal freedom and flexibility, the right amount of difficulty and challenge, because my brain really likes to to pretty hard things.

and enough of my own autonomy that that still makes sense. Because one of important core values is probably autonomy. I mean, joy is right up there, but I also kind of need to always be self-directing.

Yeah. So listening to that inner voice, like, am I happy more of the time? Or like annoyed more the of time. Pissed, annoyed, frustrated, whatever negative emotion fills that space.

Career Shifts, Coaching Stories, and Practical Next Steps

Then make a change. Yeah. Love it. So speaking of making a chance, when a doctor comes to you feeling stuck or overwhelmed or shut down, where do you start?

I start by letting them talk. All right. Listening, listening, very deeply listening for what they are saying underneath the words that they're saying and also listening.

For what? They're not saying, you know, sometimes they will say all the things that. They've tried and haven't worked. And I have questions like, are you sure it didn't work?

Or did you like kind of decide prematurely it didn't work. Did you try it in three different places? I mean, there's always something underneath what they're saying.

And it's such a relief for physicians, honestly, to first get it all out and have somebody else feed it back to them and be like, what I'm hearing you say is, this and this, and what I'm curious about is, do you have high value for autonomy?

If the first person, somebody heard me complain about work and said, it sounds like you really value autonomy, I would have been like, yes, that's what i've been trying to say.

Yes. or I really value being of joyful service to people. I want to be making a difference and not sacrificing myself at the same time. And waiting for somebody to hear that and say it back to me so that I can hear my own words in a new way and let that lead me to whatever next step needs to happen.

Yeah, I love that. Do you have any case studies or client stories that you would like to share about somebody who's gone through a journey and come out on the other side just more joyful and thriving?

Brett, I have so many. It's so hard to choose. I've coached chief medical officers who were really over it and needed to stop doing that work. But one of my more recent One of my more recent clients was somebody who was just a couple years out of training and was in a very toxic workplace culture and probably really had been still identifying with themselves as a trainee in terms of power differential, had not fully stepped into ownership of their value and maturity level as physician.

And because of a loan payback guarantee situation, they felt trapped in an extremely toxic workplace culture. And so having the benefit of sitting with a coach who could say, you know, sometimes with my colleague hat on instead of my coach hat, on say yeah, that really does sound like a messed up situation.

Nobody should be, texting you at night about whether a particular chart is closed. 24 hours yet. So anyway, this young physician learned in one of our exchanges that she's not necessarily trapped.

You know, that there are other ways to practice medicine, but the mind wasn't open to them because the minds took the first few, you know tenants as gospel and would not move beyond without being invited over that threshold.

So this person has now requested an exception to their agreement and has a business site and name and, you know, pro forma and plan and is launching a solo direct primary care practice where they are going to absolutely thrive.

Love it. And to be part of that, man, like that is, that that has joy for me. Oh, what a great success story. Love it. In fact, I need to send her to doctor talks so that she can begin sharing her stuff.

Let's get her on some podcasts. So for our doctors who are listening today who wants to start thriving and begin living with more joy today, What is the one small shift you would want them to make?

slow down a little bit, just 5% slowdown, and maybe like take a journal prompt, like what I'm actually feeling is. So self-reflection is the key. Reflecting with a thought partner or somebody who has helped other physicians may be even better, but if you just wanna do one thing, drop into yourself, and ask like, how is my inner emotional state right now and why is it that way?

And what is a single compassionate thing I could do to help relieve my own suffering right? Now, Dr. Christy Ott, this has been so wonderful. Where can our doctors find you if they want to get ahold of you?

You can find me on Instagram at ChrissyOttMD. You could find my coaching work at JoyPoint Solutions. And either one of those places are where you can my offerings and ways I like to help.

We'll put a link in the description. Can somebody sign up for a complimentary call with you? Absolutely. Yes, I will give you a link for a consult call.

It's my pleasure. Fantastic. Dr. Chrissy Ott, thank you so much. Thank you for what you do, being the founder of JoyPoint Solutions, helping doctors that is certainly near and dear to my heart.

We appreciate you. Likewise, Brad. It's our pleasure. Talk to you soon. If you found this episode valuable, please consider hitting the like, subscribe and leave a review.

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We'll see you next time.