Recover Faster: The Role Of A Health Coach In Healing Transcript

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Introduction and Speaker Background

And, again, we're I'm so pleased that you're here. Part of the Miss and Autoimmune Summit. I'm here with my good friend, Sandy. Shane. And let me introduce her, then.

So Sandy has been, leading the charge to help people utilize, health coaches as part of their clinical practice to help patients understand and work with health coaches.

She has a PhD in psychology and has developed the Functional Medicine Coaching Academy. And with that, Sandy, did I leave anything out that you think is important that we should include?

You did not. And thank you for that kind introduction. Okay. So, why don't we start with what is a health coach and can you, talk to our audience about that?

Sure. Well, very simply, a health coach takes you from where you are to where you want to be actually a coach. Think of a stage coach. An old fashioned stagecoach.

You would be picked up, and then you'd arrive at your destination. Well, that's what coaching is. It's where you are now. But you want to go somewhere else where you will have a better quality of life.

You will feel healthier, you'll have more energy wherever that might be. And here's the difference between somebody who is coaching and somebody who is acting as an expert, as a provider.

Their role is to provide a diagnosis, to come up with a plan for you. But the coach is the one who is not in the driver's seat. You are. And a coach, wherever you are, wherever you want to begin.

That's where they will be with you on this journey towards better health and coaching is.

What Health Coaching Is

So I was a clinical psychologist for many, many years, and one of the trainings that I did was in humanistic psychology. And that's where coaching comes from.

It has its roots. It's first in life coaching and you can think of health coaching is like a spin off from life coaching, and it addresses the factors that have to do with not only your mental emotional health, but also your physical health and increasingly, your social health.

So a coach looks at all of those areas that are what we call lifestyle factors, like what are you eating? Are you moving throughout the day? Are you doing exercise?

Are you getting sufficient sleep? Are you hydrated? What about the stress in your life and what about your relationships? So those are what we call in functional medicine the modifiable lifestyle factors.

And those are the areas that coaches are trained to address. You know, I think many of us understand that our athletes perform better if they have a coach who they can work with to help them identify the areas of strengths and weakness and where they want to be working.

As a small business owner, I've certainly I've worked with many entrepreneurial coaches to help me think about, what is my passion, what kind of, business I want to create and how to grow that, and be more effectively.

So I think we're all understand that coaches can help us achieve the goals that we lay out for ourselves. You know,

in in my practice, when I'm handing off my patients to my health coach, I let people know that this is about, supporting you as you identify.

Okay. What are my goals? Where do I want to focus? And, that conversation with the coach. Why don't we talk about, how that coach might help, my new patient when I've handed them off?

That's okay. I recommended that the either do the Mediterranean diet or the paleo diet. Paleo diet. It's about twice as effective as Mediterranean, but, that the the patient can choose which of the two they want to do.

So now I hand them off to your team. Sandy, what's the next step? Sure. So the next step would be, first of all, to build rapport, to let this person know that you are accepting them unconditionally.

Call it unconditional positive regard because they may feel that they look at the plan. And, and they may say, you know, I know this is too hard. I don't know if I can do this or I can do it, but I know I'm going to get a lot of pushback from my family.

They don't understand that, how this could possibly help my mess. Or they may say, you know, I have so much stress and I don't know if this is just too overwhelming for me.

Or they may be confused. And you may have done a fantastic job. You did do a fantastic job of explaining, this plan, this paleo or Mediterranean and but then how they look at it and they say, I have all these questions that they didn't think of when they were with you.

And what a coach does first and foremost is listen and conveys the sense that wherever they are, that's good. This is where they can start. And it might be that they start with making some very simple changes, and maybe it isn't even in the area of diet.

Maybe it is. And they're really talking about what perhaps they didn't disclose, you know, the stress in their life or the difficulty that they're having with their relationships.

And so that's where it starts.

How Coaches Support Behavior Change

And then once they are in a state where they can now turn to diet, then they might be better able to, but perhaps they're so stressed that their their executive functioning is off and they're not even thinking clearly.

Or perhaps they are so worried about their condition about VMs that it's hard for them to process information. And so what a coach does is listen, and then they develop a place to start.

And how they do that, they ask them what matters most. Questions like what do you want your health for? And they start to open up. And what happens is they talk about they want to, their children, they want to see their grandchildren, and they want to have energy to be able to go out and walk and do the things they love to do.

And so then they have this moment where they now say, yes, I'm ready, I'm ready. Okay. Now I'm going to dig into this paleo approach and I'm ready to do it.

And then the next step is the accountability. How do you know? How do you want me to work with you? How what how do you want me to hold you accountable?

And so that is very, very effective. And there's a lot of research now. And the effectiveness of coaching. We did our own randomized controlled trial with AFM where we were, a group was getting coached and one group was not.

And time and time again, what happens, what we find in so many studies now is that self efficacy improves. In other words, have a sense now that I'm in charge of my destiny, I can make these changes.

I am worthy to do this and I can change. So it is a very profound mindset shift that is then allowing them to make these diet and lifestyle changes, you know, and with my patients, I ask them to think deeply.

Do they need small little next steps that they could achieve, or are they ready for a really big wholesale change where they're going to do everything at once?

And for everyone who's listening? The vast majority of my patients need small, achievable next steps, and that's okay. I do sometimes have folks who are ready for that big wholesale change, and that's okay too.

And also and I fully support either path. You have to know what works for you and your family. So, let's talk a little bit about emotional wellness. And I think that's an area where health coaches can be very helpful.

Do you have some thoughts on that? Yes. In fact, there was a recent study. It was coaching, patients who had been diagnosed with cancer and what was found, and this is not a typical, this is whatever serious chronic condition someone might be faced with. Ms..

What happens in coaching is you build resiliency. And that's where positive psychology comes in. A positive psychology is often misinterpreted as only positive.

You know, we're not going to consider, emotions that, such as sadness if you're grieving, if you're frustrated, if you're feeling hopeless and what positive psychology does is focus on building resiliency for post-traumatic growth out of a difficult experience, you get stronger and what a coach will do is identify those traits that we all have that have to do with psychological strength.

And by asking, like, what's strong with you? And they identify, for example, perseverance, perhaps somebody who went from doctor to doctor and maybe they were criticized for that, but they didn't give up.

They didn't just accept one person's answer if it didn't fit for them. So they went on and they learned more and more. They did not give up until they found the right strategy that would lead them to a better health status.

So it's things like gratitude and curious and humor and zest. So there are associations. It's the V. A. Institute of Character where you can take a survey and you can assess these character strengths, and we all have them.

And it is these are the building blocks for a life well-lived. When we are thriving, we are using strength. So for example, with me it is zest. I'm always like, you know, I'm standing right now and I'm talking with my hands and getting very excited about things.

And for somebody else, it might be a strength that has to do with bravery or self-regulation or curiosity is a strength that. Curious to learn more about.

How about this paleo diet? And I'm going to learn all I can love of learning. And so a coach identifies or helps people identify these basic traits, these strengths.

And you use those.

Emotional Wellness and Resilience

One of the best ones is perseverance but also perspective where things and you learn to not sweat the small stuff, so to speak. You see the big picture, what really matters to you and what we're finding with people who have serious chronic conditions is that that ability to to just focus on what is truly most important, what they value most in life, what gives them meaning and purpose.

And that leads to a very profound sense of well-being. And, earlier in my career, before I founded FMC, I was a psychologist, and one of the areas that I worked in was psychosocial oncology.

So I would get a lot of referrals from oncologists. And, what we focused on often in a group was their resiliency, their ability to truly wake up each day and focus on what was going well, what mattered most to them.

And so no matter what condition you have as you do this, it creates a profound sense of of well-being despite a medical condition. You know, it makes me think about, some of my cancer patients who, you know, went through the treatment, and it was clear that, they were going to die from their illness.

And yet, they would often tell me. And this took me a while to get my head around this, that they were profoundly grateful for their diagnosis because it clarified much in their life.

It clarified, who was important? It clarified that they really had to make peace with their estranged family members that they hadn't spoken with in several years.

And like, no, no, no, I got to get that fixed. And so now, with my Ms. patients, and we go through sort of a similar thing to it. Kubler-Ross is death and dying, you know, anger, bargaining, you know, denial, acceptance.

Finally, and so, you know, I remember going through all of that as I was coming to terms with becoming more and more disabled. And yet there was a point where it's like, okay, I had to think deeply.

What's the gift in my circumstance, what really matters to me? And that was my children. And so I had to think deeply, like, okay, how could I still parent?

How could I still make choices for when you face the really hard times? Because I know my kids are going to face a hard times when they're adults. How could I model that? You don't give up.

You got to just keep doing the best you can. And so that those kinds of conversations, I think what I'm hearing, you tell me, Sandy, is those types of conversations, not telling people what to do, but to help them think through, given their circumstance, what matters, what choices, do they want to make for the people that matter to them?

Absolutely. That is so well said. And what is really special about a relationship between a coach and a patient. So in, in in coaching, we call them clients because coaches are not medical doctors licensed and have patients.

But it is a profound heart centered relationship. And it is therapy like, but I want to be real clear that is not psychotherapy. And we do have coaches who may have prior licenses as psychologists or social workers, for example, but for a coaching session, this is not therapy.

And I think this is very important because many people I saw this when I was a psychologist, it's a doing. They're doing a disservice if just because you are experience, you want to talk about the issues.

We're just describing the difficulties you're encountering. And now a doctor refers you to a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and now you're given a man a psychiatric diagnosis, when in fact you wouldn't have had these issues if you hadn't been diagnosed with Ms.

it's an overlay, and so a coach will normalize it. Yes. This is normal to have these feelings, especially if they're coaching people in a group where everybody says, yeah, I feel this way too.

And so it is not, you know, yes, we do have people who have serious a serious diagnosis that would warrant working with a therapist, for example. But we're talking about people who are having a reaction to their condition and want the opportunity to just talk to somebody who gets it, who accepts you, who listens so you feel heard and you feel like a weight has been lifted and you are able to find meaning and purpose in life and post-traumatic growth, resiliency.

Yeah. I think finding meaning in your life, and helping identify what are the small next steps that speak to me, then I feel like, okay, you know, that those are steps I could take.

And that will help me achieve that goal. Whatever that goal was that, I identified in my earlier sessions. So I think we've been talking about, the various ways that a coach can help and saying, I'm going to think I'm going to try and summarize that for our, audience who, they're not therapists.

They but they will help you reflect on what are your goals that matter and speak to my heart. And once I it might be different than what the doctor told me.

So I may come up with a slightly different set of goals. And then again, in conversation with my coach, I, will identify the next step, the next little discrete goal that I'm going to work on.

And then also with my coach, I will identify how frequently I want to check in. And maybe I want to check in weekly. Maybe I want to check in monthly.

Maybe I want to check in quarterly. So it's up to me to sort of work that out. The coach, what frequency is. And then I check in, on my progress.

Finding Meaning Through Chronic Illness

And I either hit my goals or I don't. And then I can have a conversation like, well, that was too hard. I didn't really speak to my heart. I know I said I was going to make these changes about daily exercise, but you know what?

I'm really not ready to exercise. So I think we have to find a different domain. And so we had that conversation, set out new goals. And then when the next check in is that, an accurate description of that coaching relationship?

That is an absolute accurate description. Yes. That is the process. Okay. This is profound. We we use this in my clinical trials. We use this in my clinical practice.

I actually I should tell everyone I, teach for the functional Medicine coaching Academy, and I've done that for several years. I love chatting, with the coaches and helping them, understand these key, key principles.

So I think we've got people probably fired up that this might be something that's helpful for me, but my physician didn't mention a coach. I don't think my medical team has coaches, but I think I want one.

So now what? Yes. Well, you can find a coach. And, you can work with one of our graduates. And when you are finding a coach, the first thing you would look for is somebody who is board certified in health and wellness coaching.

As a school, we are approved. So that means we are approved by the National Board for Health and Wellness Coaching, which means that our graduates, I can sit for the exam, they log a certain number of hours, and now they become national board certified health and wellness coaches.

That is the gold standard. It means that they have met the minimum criteria for coaching. And this is a field where you may run into somebody who just took a weekend course and says they're a health coach.

And so, we recommend again, asking somebody for their credentials. Are you board certified in coaching? You can go to functional medicine coaching.org and find a health coach.

We have a directory of our graduates. And so you find one that fits for you. And it is basically a set where you feel comfortable with that individual.

Because this is a very powerful relationship that will benefit you. It is coaching face to face. You know, is coaching zoom, does it go across state lines internationally?

How does that work? Yeah. So some coaching would be in person if you happen to find someone in your region. But more and more coaching is remote. It is just number zoom.

And it is international. And coaches are not licensed as health care practitioners. Now, some coaches may be they may be, a nurse, for example, they may be a medical doctor.

But for coaching they can coach across state lines, because it is not licensed state by state. And so they can cross those state lines. But again, the key again is finding somebody who you are comfortable with when you people do special guys in autoimmune conditions as health coaches, even in, in Ms..

We've had graduates who've had Ms. themselves. And so, you can find somebody who gets you and who is there to support you. The main thing is you find someone who is listening and not judging you.

You know what? Everyone who's listening, I want to describe for you a trajectory that I often see in my patients, in and, and my tribe that follows me.

They've had their chronic illness, whether it's multiple sclerosis or some other complex chronic autoimmune condition or other chronic health problem.

They discover my work, they begin implementing diet, lifestyle, you know, really functional medicine principles along with whatever else they were doing traditionally.

And they begin to recover, and they go often from being disabled and able to work to getting their energy back, their mental clarity back. And now they have a new mission on life.

They're like, oh my God, you know, things are better. I want other people to know that things can be better. And so they're reaching out to me like, okay, and I'm often sending them to Sandy's program because they are inspired.

Now they want to have a coaching relationship with other folks.

Working With or Becoming a Health Coach

Now, what's super interesting, so these other folks may have had that account accountants, lawyers, physicians, engineers, you know, telephone linemen, you know, a variety of professions, some professional, some more blue collar.

But they've got their lives back. And while they could go back to their previous work, sometimes it no longer speaks to their heart. And what speaks to their heart is helping other people who, like them, had been, you know, lost their livelihood because of their illness.

And now that they are back, they want to help spread that possibility to others. For all of you who are listening, I want you to feel hope. If you feel like, man, I've lost my profession.

I've lost my work. I've lost my employment, implement all these wonderful things you're going to hear from, the Ms. and Autoimmune Summer because you're gonna get a lot of great tools.

Stay with it. It might take you six months, might take you a year, might take you a couple years to fully recover. But when you come back, when you recover, and I'm hopeful that you will, and you have this new life mission, you're like, I want to help others.

Health coaching, may speak to your heart, as you recover. And so, there's there's two calls out here. One, if you want a health coach, go to a, Sandy, give us the, website again.

It's functional medicine coaching.org. And then you can go to find a coach. So you can go there, to get a coach. And then hopefully when you recover and you are feeling strong, you're like, oh my God, this, this work speaks to me.

Then you could go to the same, website and to give to us one more time. Functional medicine coaching.org. And

you can become a health and wellness coach.

And so how long would that take? That's a 12 month program. It is all online. And, it is what people come through the program, say they'll they want to learn the functional medicine content, which is taught by people like Doctor Walls.

But when they graduate, they say they are personally transformed, primarily because of the deep dive we do into positive psychology how to have a life well lived, how to communicate with others using the coach approach.

It changes you. It's profound. It's a heart centered connection that you have with other people. And it is personally very, very enriching. So we have people from all walks of life and some, have PhDs in biochemistry.

Some have been stay at home moms. And as you said, they we have corporate, bankers who are coming because they're stressed and burnout. And we have so many probably, about 90% of our students and graduates had some type of medical condition themselves.

Now, they found functional medicine. They worked with people like Doctor Walz, and now they want to give back Mrs. mission driven to this. Is there now meaning and purpose in life?

You know, I think that's what makes, health coaching so powerful. And this is again, I encourage all of you, if you can, check out or hear the coach, because these conversations about what speaks to your heart.

Because, you we can do hard things when it speaks to our heart. If it doesn't speak to my heart, I want comfort. Pleasure in activity. Biologically, that's what we all want.

But if it speaks to my heart, I can do, you know, really hard stuff. So, the question I like to ask my patients to help them figure out what speaks to their heart.

You know, if you if you're looking at your home and smoke's blowing out the windows, so maybe a fire is brewing, who or what do you care so much about that you would run barefoot over broken glass to go save blood.

Even thinking, and, that you. It doesn't take long. And people say, my children, my grandchildren. Hopefully they're also saying their spouse. It might be the cat or the dog.

Occasionally it's it's a body of work that they've been working on, that they care so much about. And then when we talk about how to be there more effectively for their cat, their dog, their family members, now we have a task that speaks to their heart.

And now people can do hard things, but it's those kinds of conversations with the coach that will help you identify what speaks to your heart so that, yeah, now you'll be successful doing hard things.

Yes, exactly. So I'll said, okay. Well, Sandy, this has been, really wonderful. I want to thank you so much, for all of the collaborations we've had over the many years, and for the, wonderful work that you're doing with the Functional Medicine Coaching Academy.

Thank you. This has been a pleasure to speak on this summit and to to be with you. So thank you for all that you do.