Crisis Response and Brain Regulation

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your amygdala swells and all kinds of stuff. So that's why I say if you're daily practicing these tools, you'll be able to recall it and when you can't, I love to place little sticky notes all over my house so I can remember, do that drill or do the little ear stimulation and it'll immediately kick that prefrontal cortex back online so you could make a decision in the moment to know how to handle things so it's not, you're not driving into overwhelm when your like, wait I think I know what to do and you cant remember.

Have you made it past menopause, or are you going through it now? I'm Dr. Pat McShane, and on the Women's Health Span Voices podcast, I'll guide you through the menoppausal transition and beyond.

helping you to thrive in this powerful time of your womanhood. Hello and welcome to Women's HealthSpan Voices. I'm Dr. Pat McShane, and I am very excited to have as my guest today Dr Laurel Oliver.

Introducing Women's HealthSpan Voices

And she has a unique background and a uniquely approach to healing, basically, And I will let her tell us more about that, but her basic orientation is towards the neurological side of her well-being and of our hormones and stress and a number of other things that we learn about in our typical medical approaches to problems.

But she has a very unique approach and unique basically strategy for healing people. And I will let her tell us more about that. But the overarching theme, as far as I can tell, and again, I'm not trained in this, is that you can't heal if your mind and body are in survival mode.

your body has to choose between those two things. And maybe I'll let you jump in there, Dr. Laurel, and tell us more detail about what might be keeping people from healing.

Yeah, thank you, Dr. McShane. I appreciate this time together. Yeah. My unique approach is my philosophy is you are the captain of your ship.

Applied Neurology and Rewiring Safety

And if you don't know what's going on in your body, how can we pattern safety back into our bodies when we have gone through fatigue and overwhelm and chronic stress?

and inflammation are not the root causes. And so when we peel back the layers and we can see that it's actually neurology going on in our body where we create new patterns from our brain to our nervous system and collect data points from that nervous as we learn its language.

We can then build a, through neuroplasticity, a rewire in the patterns to build safety back where it's been in fight, flight, fawn, or freeze for a long time.

And it knows that pattern as safe, but it's been defined because it has been chronically trying to survive for so long. And so a person that's surviving their circumstance or their environment is actually the body is when you come out of that and your mind, you can do a lot of cognitive work in counseling, but your body, is left behind.

And that was my story as I took this journey of healing myself and found applied neurology to be a key asset to

rewiring what my mind thought it went through, but my body had a different story to tell and it remembers things differently than your brain.

And so when we can pause long enough and collect the skills to actually interpret those data points from the nervous system, then we go back in and help give it aid and support that it is in dire need of.

My understanding is that there's actually a tremendous amount of very good research and literature on these topics, but that somehow it hasn't made it into mainstream medical care or even functional medicine to a large extent.

So that's why I find it so refreshing to hear what you have to tell our audience today. And just to back up, your practice is called rewire revival. which again is what you just told us, how you can rewire your nervous system to be giving proper signals basically to your body and for your healing.

So tell us a little bit about how can tease out the factors with a given woman when she comes into you with symptoms that just haven't been properly or satisfactorily addressed in her medical care to that point.

So how do you figure out what might need rewiring? Yeah, that's a great question. So to back up a little bit for a foundation, you're so right in saying like, the conventional way of learning functional medicine does not teach this.

And I have been learning, I've been having a lot of people come and have conversations with me and in the functional medicine space saying my client is getting stuck in their protocol and they can't do the lifestyle stuff and it's too stressful and their having inflammation and toxins surface but they cant flush them out, they cannot do detox and there's blockages and so I always say have you ever tried neurology?

Have you tried using somatics? And so, they're like, what is that? I was going to say, What is That? Yeah. And, so somatics is basically, it's what I do, applied neurology.

It's these little drills that you can do with your body in increasing vagal tone. In a vagus tone, if it is low, you cannot drop into the parasympathetic.

Somatic Tools and Daily Practice

So, when you cant, that means that your going Chronic stress and the chronic stress is what's driving the cortisol It's striving hot flashes striving all of that.

And so when we can drop down in the parasympathetic I Teach my women these tools. So for example, I'll show you real quickly There is a vagus nerve that runs through in your cheek right here And if you press your tongue my left side is better than my right I get a bigger payoff I'll push my tongue into my cheek, count to four, and it immediately sends activation into cranial nerve and I will be able to have more focus, more breath.

Oh, there it goes. And a sigh. It immediately calms me down. So if I feel a little, even in this podcast, right, I need to be you able And if I feel my heart racing a little bit or my clammy hands, I'll just do a drill like that.

It might look a bit weird, but it really works and it works really quickly. So those are some things I have a library that I put into a curriculum and I teach women these drills.

And we develop a rescue toolkit first. So the things like if they have tightness in their chest and their abdomen where they more of a freeze response because that's common in chronic stress to kind of brace, there's different neurology drills that you can activate and you provide a new input for the stimulus so they can have a different output.

of you're changing how you, if you are freezing or bracing and so you increasing breath, you increase balance, your doing vision training, it goes on and on.

And what's been your experience? Is this successful for most kinds of unresolved clinical issues with enough time and effort? And I think you write in your website the after you practice consistently.

Yes. Daily, I say daily. Because what happens is when you come into a unexpected event where you freeze and you don't know how to handle it, or a crisis, so I teach a lot of crisis intervention, your prefrontal cortex, the main part of your brain that drives decision-making, it goes offline and it kind of…

your amygdala swells and all kinds of stuff. So that's why I said if you're daily practicing these tools, you'll be able to recall it. And when you can't, I love to place little sticky notes all over my house so I can remember, do that.

Do that drill or do the little ear stimulation and it'll immediately kick that prefrontal cortex back online. So you make a decision in the moment to know how to handle things.

You're not driving into overwhelm when your like, wait, think I know what to do and you, you cant remember. This is so refreshing to me because I keep reading, you know, lists of things that we're supposed to unravel to be healthier.

And some of them are very obvious, get enough sleep, don't drink too much alcohol, Don't smoke cigarettes, etc. and then we get to stress and I'm like, And you tell people, oh, meditate or do yoga.

And as you said, the practitioners call you up and say, but Mike, my patient can't do X, Y, and Z. What do you think now?

Limiting Beliefs and Emotional Processing

So these are novel approaches that I really think would be helpful for many, many people for whom yoga and meditation and joining a book club, you know, whatever it is that we're supposed to be doing isn't either available or helpful for that woman.

You know you bring up a really good conversation and I want to chime in on that because you said the key word doing and my philosophy in my practice is all about being and how to convert all these things because in the functional medicine space and in a nutrition space, it's even biohacking.

We're taught as a community to What am I missing? What aid do I need to add in to start doing? So when you think about meditation or frequency or any kind of device that you need in the moment to calm down, that's something that many people in crisis or in chronic stress or pain or so much freeze response are unable to add their capacity already.

They don't need more things to do and more. So my philosophy is that this applied neurology is something that becomes a part of you and because it's developed within you.

It's developed from a space that is so unique to your physiology. I teach an N equals one principle. What works for you isn't going to work for the next person because they haven't been through the same upbringing or traumatic response events that you have and they have it interpreted the way.

And so they something of physiology that needs a certain interpretation and only they know what that is and can be in tune with what is. And so I teach these drills to be, well, how to assess and reassess if it's a positive or negative response for you.

Then I have a journal that I print for them and they'd keep notes of what works and what doesn't today because tomorrow might have, a whole set of other regulatory.

Yes. And so you've got to track things, but not track in a way that is keeping you bound to that as some kind of label or identity. Because I think that A lot of the time when we get labs done and the reports come back and it's, oh, you have Hashimoto's or you high thyroid or all these things.

And sometimes it can be a label that. we then recite in our brain and again to the neuroplasticity thing, what you focus on expands. And it not only expands and is rehearsed in your brain, the more you say it over your life and over body and your health.

it's going to channel in your nervous system and be recorded there and the outputs are going then to be interpreted as this is something that I need to learn for myself and that learning is not going be ideal for goals such as lowering inflammation and lowering and getting balanced and healthy.

And so I focus a lot on your mind and rewiring your belief systems to come into a new agreement to break off the addictions of the things that you have been reciting all your life, the thing that once served you, no longer are serving you in this new season that step into for your health journey.

And we talk a lot about what that looks like and how to repattern new beliefs and new mantras and for that kind of expansion that your needing. Maybe you could expand a little bit on the idea of limiting beliefs, because again, in some of your other materials, you cite a few examples of people saying, the only time I can take time off is when I'm sick, or the Only time anyone pays attention to me is When I am ill.

And those kinds of beliefs obviously are the kind of wiring that you're talking about, and those will quite effectively keep one from healing, I would imagine.

they really do on a neuroscience level? Absolutely. And those feelings and those emotions are real and they don't need to be suppressed or quieted or shut down.

They need be moved through the body safely though. My philosophy is that you don t just Those no longer serve you and we're not going to pay attention to that.

No, bring, those are data points. Those are points that served you for a long time. And so let's get curious and let us ask good questions that serve for, why did they serve?

Are they going serve well in this new season? We just go through a list of getting really raw about reflecting upon those ideas that, you know, they came into our life and they helped us, or did they?

for a while, but what are they doing right now? And what if we don't entertain them? What happens to you then? Nothing? Okay, then let's talk about a new idea.

And so I introduce a We do this emotional regulation process with these limiting beliefs while we are doing an applied neuro drill.

Menopause, Identity, and the Second Spring

Because the neurodrill, when we're talking about something that's really activating, like letting go of a limiting belief, that can often feel like grief.

And because you're letting go of something, you are letting of go something that you held near and dear to your life. You believe that it served you, and maybe it does still, but maybe, it needs to be aided with a new belief that is drawing it into the higher level.

And so, we have grief processing, trauma processing. We have a lot of things that need aid of that activation that's happening in your body during those discussions.

And so the applied neural drills bring you back into relaxation and calm, but not too much stimulus that it's breaking off, moving that emotion through the body.

Cause that can happen too, where you end up stopping the emotion of anger. That's another one, panic. fight, defense, things like that. And so we don't want to stop it unless it's becoming an absolute threat.

Then we do, we'll do a high payoff and we will just nip it in the bud and say, let's visit that later. But the goal is to rehab those areas and fully embody a safety signaling that can stop the pattern in the loop of suppressing things that, well, let's just put that on the back burner or that's too triggering for me and I can't handle that conversation.

or blocking it out of your mind or out if your, you know, lifestyle even. And what's happening is if it's un-dealt with, it doesn't go away in the body.

The body will still carry on a suppression and suppression if un dealt with for a long time will carry out through illness. And so, and even autoimmune diseases.

That's all very, very interesting and not frequently recognized is my guess. Although as a clinician, when someone walks in the room or on the screen, you can sometimes see, well, we have a problem here, Houston.

This person looks very anxious or very depressed, but our background and our training and kind of what we expect to be able to do in our short time frame is essentially tell them what they can do medically and not deal with the anxiety or the depression or fear that we know is going to keep them from being successful with treatment.

So those are all great observations on your part. I, just to change gears a little bit here for my audience, our audience. Identity changing over identity disorientation during the post-menopausal era.

Well, perimenopause in some instances, but also certainly post menopose. Many of us have either changed or given up our career. Our families have moved on, moved away maybe, and our role has totally changed.

And my experience, I certainly didn't invent this observation, but is that older women become invisible. because we're not the valued entity in our culture currently.

Hopefully that will change over time. And how does that impact on our brain and our well-being? I know that's a pretty broad topic, but maybe you could address what you've experienced with your patients clinically.

Yeah, there's a lot that happens when you switch to, you know, your main high into menopause. You know you're previously running this power plant, based on estrogen.

And so now it's switching gears and now you have this default mode network. The brain's inner architecture basically activating a lotta things. So your medial prefrontal cortex starts self-regulating this thinking of about identity.

What I've read about menopause is that you become more self-aware and you need more care and become clearer on what you needed out of life. I think that is such a beautiful part of menoppause that needs to be just set in a beautiful environment and not a what's happening to me.

I think there's a lot of emphasis on this crisis basically of the hot flashes and this focus on all the changes that happen to you. But really it is a beautifully metamorphosis because after menopause you become so Well, your brain is rewired for a different kind of network, a difference mode.

And so there's strikingly psychological shifts that happen. There's sudden clarity, there is an intolerance of inauthenticity. So it's kind, maybe for you, I hear people say, I feel like I'm finally awake.

And so I think that this paramanopause into menopausal is a perfect marriage for this shift of implementing applied neurology because you're already trying to rewire the brain for.

This new pattern of safety in your life. and this is the perfect time in life to introduce these new safety signals because, you are already going through this.

metamorphosis basically and so I think there's an extreme advantage to doing parasympathetic vagal tone somatic practice through this because fun to just speak on grief a little bit.

There's a lot of grief that happens. You're letting go of the way your body used to function. There's a lot of loss and there's lot neurological repatterning.

And so what happens in those times is while you're grieving the loss of your role, your relationship, your identity to certain things that you used to be able to have with certain vigor or certain pace, their pace changes.

There can be a lot of chronic stress and trauma that activates in that time. And that's where I like to speak with great encouragement, not, okay, this is what's happening to you.

This is so sad that your in a down world spiral. No more estrogen. Your arteries are suffering, your bones are suffer, ing your muscles suffering your gut is suffering.

Yes, that's the messaging. That is the language that women who come to me are speaking over themselves. And so I'm like, I get my counseling hat on and I am just like listening.

that is totally valid.

Purpose, Authenticity, and Closing Thoughts

But guess what? Here's the good news. And I just, I could usher them in some good new. So that modulation through, oh, don't have to suppress these signals.

These are data points and my body's becoming something that is going to offer me something different. That's exciting. Here are some skill sets to help regulate as best as we can through those changes.

I interviewed an Asian Chinese medicine practitioner recently who said that in the Chinese medical view, menopause is called the second spring. And I just love that because, again, you have a freedom from reproduction and caring for very young children, unless you've grandchildren to care for, of course.

But then you're in a new world, essentially, and the rewire possibilities are huge at that point. So I love that, I loved that. Absolutely. We need to talk about that more often.

That's the messaging. Yes, yes. And what are the kinds of things that you would tell our audience that they, I mean, without going through the whole premise of meeting with you probably, but that, you have found to be helpful for, for most women to just start doing now before, even if they're not experiencing any, any issues or problems.

Yes. So like premenopause. Well, post-menopause, once we've kind of made that transition. Yeah, I would say in every season, we always are processing how and interpreting life through a certain lens.

And I'd ask, what is that lens? Is it giving, is it life giving? And so there's some assessments that I built into my practice that we can analyze these in depth.

So with that data, I'm able to then deliver this nuanced care for at this point of life. These tools are still applicable because while you're not doing hot flashes and you are still in an identity crisis, maybe not a crisis.

life looks different, maybe life look calm, but are you still able to… What keeps coming to mind as I'm discussing this is a common question at this stage of life, and it resounds around the topic of purpose.

A lot of people talk about that, so purpose isn't something that you find in someone else or your environment something that comes through your story, comes to your testimony.

And if we just continue to live in this, in outputting things that we have regurgitation instead of something has been filtered through an expression of this is my purpose in life with a lot of passion and conviction, then through that, we can use things like the pace breathing and the straw breathing, and humming and dancing and music and things that make us feel alive.

I'm not sure if that answered your question, but No, as you're speaking, I'm coming back to the words you used earlier, which is authenticity. As we peel back many of the roles that we had in our career perhaps or our work or in family and the expectation that will be there, you know, for all these purposes all the time basically.

And there's more expectations as we're older as well, but they're certainly very different. And oftentimes they're more driven by ourselves and not so much the outside world, you know, the need to make sure everybody's on the bus by 7.45 in the morning with their lunch bag and so on.

So that then as we unravel the need to be all these other roles, you know, the cook and the house cleaner and medical care provider for this one and that one, and for ourselves and so on.

As we unravelled those purposes, we have an opportunity to explore more deeply our own purpose in being here. And, you know, as many of us are looking at the end of our life and wondering what that's, when is that going to be, what's that gonna be all about?

And if it happened today, am I able to say, okay, I lived a purposeful life, and I'm glad for the things that I did, so on and so forth. So, I think that that's foundational to well-being and is a better predictor of even your health, because again, your brain and your life circumstances are tightly connected.

There's been a fair amount of data about people who have those kinds of connections with other people and purpose that they live longer and healthier than people, who don't have that.

So I think the advice here would be to allow opportunity in your life to seek your purpose and explore what that really means for you. Yes. Invite it, invite it to take its course.

Say, you're welcome here. If it's just gardening all afternoon, enjoy that. Listen to the birds, listen to them. Yeah. Listening to music, dance, as you mentioned.

All right. Well, this has been just a fantastic exploration of a novel approach to healing and well-being that I really, really appreciate. And I hope our audience will also, I know that our audiences will appreciate it.

So, thank you so much, Dr. Laurel. It was great to have you. You're very welcome. Thank you, so And for my audience here, if this is the kind of information that you treasure and want to hear more of, please like and subscribe and tell your friends and that will help us to reach a broader audience.

So be well. Thank you so much for listening. If this episode spoke to you, Please share it with a friend ready to take charge of her health. And please leave a review.

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