Forum Health Summit Overview

This episode dives into the heart of Forum Health, who we are, why we exist, and where we're going. Following the 2025 Forum Health Summit, Amanda and Dr.

Peterson sit down to reflect on how the organization has evolved, what fuels their mission, and how Forum Health is redefining what healthcare can look like for communities across the country.

Listeners will walk away understanding that Forum Health isn't just another integrative medicine clinic. It's a nationwide movement of providers dedicated to proactive root cause care.

Let's get started. This is Doctor Talks. Welcome back to the Integrative Medicine Podcast. I'm your host, Amanda, and I'm joined with our co-host, Dr.

Peterson, today. Today, we're going to talk about who Form Health is and our Form Health Summit. Dr. Peterson, we just wrapped up our 2025 Form Health Summit.

For those of you guys who don't know out there, Forum Health hosts an integrative medicine summit or conference every year. It's also known as our Midwest Functional Medicine Symposium.

It has to be one of the most meaningful events we put on every year, and this one especially was just so different. We've been doing this for about five years now, and every year it evolves into something more and more powerful.

Dr. Peterson, you've been here before me. You're one of the OGs of Forum Health. Can you tell us a little bit about the summit, how it started and how you feel about this year?

Sure. Yeah. I mean, this year was fantastic. And I do agree. I think it was the best one we've had so far. Let's see how to tell you about it. So the summit is for providers and it's not just our form health providers that can attend.

It's all integrative providers that are, you know, across the country. I think we mostly attract providers from the Midwest, but actually I sat next to a woman who said, oh my heavens, Dr.

Papasatiri, I saw that Dr. Papasatiri was going to be at your conference. I signed up two weeks ago so I could come hear him speak, right? I mean, it's not that easy to get someone to fly here from Greece or Switzerland, right?

So we have medical providers, nurse practitioners, physicians, PAs from around the nation. Most of them are part of the Forum Health Family. And we get together and there's a part of the conference that's just for our providers to sort of help highlight the things that we should be focusing on with our patients.

And then there's a day of the conference where it's just integrative speakers and everything this year from cancer to hormones to men's health, really a tremendous slate of speakers, excellent speakers, people that everyone, patients and physicians alike would be blessed to listen to and learn from.

Yeah, I mean, I've been with Forum for a little over four years, and this is my fourth summit that I've gotten to attend. And it was so powerful. I think the fact that this organization, one, brings all of these providers together to just network and connect.

and talk about our patients, our experiences in our local clinics, and what we can do to move forward in our communities and in our local clinics, but also from a national level, I think is just so powerful.

And the fact that we invite providers in for another day of just collaboration, and I think one of the Really unique things is, you know, you said from cancer to gut health and hormones.

We cover so many different topics because what we do at Forum Health is root cause. We don't just narrow in on one thing, we look at the whole person.

And so even our speaker lineup and our topics are so diverse because the way that we help our patients is very unique and encompasses all of the systems of the body and things like that.

So I think that it's such a unique conference. And I remember when I started and had our first conference, we were maybe 25 providers. And now this past year, we surpassed 100 providers in our network.

It just also goes to show how much we've grown and how much this medicine is starting to be adopted. And this is just the beginning of it. I think that's a really important point.

You know, when I graduated from residency over 20 years ago, you know, you go to conferences, you have to get your CME. And the experience that you're having is one of saying, I need to be up to date on things that matter to my patients.

The experience I think that is happening across the country for patients and medical providers alike is I need to figure out how health works and be healthy myself and then sort of share that with the people that I come in contact with.

There's a real difference in going, my first CME that I went to, I'd been out of residency for a year, was an endocrine conference.

How Forum Health Began

And everything was sort of, the patients have these problems, here's how we're going to fix it. And you go to an integrative medical conference and it's, this is how we can be healthy and we're going to live it, right?

Like there's this excitement of, oh, I just found this thing out, a grounding mat or some supplement or stem cells, and I'm going to go home and do this on myself as well as my patients.

I don't think that's the normal experience that you have when you go to a medical conference that's, you know, your more conventional conference. You're listening to this stuff as though you are some sort of a god from on high that is going to bestow blessings to the riffraff, as opposed to, hey, this is how we can be healthy.

Let's all do this together. This works, right? So, in that respect, I think the whole country is changing. And probably a lot of it has to do with the information age and the internet.

And people are now no longer at the mercy of some, you know, benighted expert. Look, I have the certificate on the wall, so I'm smarter than you. No, it turns out that all you have to do to get information is go find it, right?

Before it was in books that were hard to get. Now, you still have to know what information is accurate. It's really exciting to live in a time when people are moving to a different perspective.

It's not an illness-based approach. It's a health-based approach, right? Even the idea of root cause, which is so important if there is something wrong, is only part of, I think, what we're achieving as Integrative Medicine and Forum Health and other organizations like ours move the needle forward to saying, Because there's a root cause to what's wrong, but there's a root cause to what's right as well, right?

You don't have to wait for something to break before you can say, oh, I should look at the cause, right? The cause of good health is X, Y, and Z, right?

Eating the right foods, exercising, getting enough rest. It's not just the solution to your illness. It is really exciting and to see medicine change.

And I think maybe we see the things that we experience. And so, you know, it's like when I bought a Nissan and then all of a sudden I was like, Oh, everybody's driving a Nissan.

Well, I'm sure there were the same number of Nissan's, right? So as I entered integrative medicine, and then I think, Oh, this is the experience all the physicians must be having.

Sadly, it's not true yet, but more of them are having this experience than ever before. And more patients are having this experience than ever before.

I can be healthy. I don't have to wait till I'm sick. Yeah, and I do think too, patients are starting to come in with a different level of knowledge and education, which has accelerated the care and the discussions with providers.

in those appointments. I mean, we at Forum Health have the luxury of, you know, 60 minute new patient appointments. Most times we do offer some 30 minute ones, but you know, having that 60 minutes and patients who are more educated coming in has, I feel like, just accelerated things so much for people.

Some of the, the summit stood out so much to me this year from the energy and the growth that we saw in the collaboration. And, you know, it is really different than traditional conferences, not just in the content, but I think in the providers who attend those too.

You know, I know I see providers walking around integrative and functional medicine conferences, which I've only had the opportunity to go to those types of conferences.

But they're walking around with their, they're coming in from all over the globe and they're bringing PMF mats, red light therapy. Like the people who are going to these conferences, like you said, they're living, they're living and breathing it at the same time also.

And so I feel like these conferences also provide more energy and you're walking away much more inspired with these conferences. And I think that's really great.

The truth is inspiring. And then living the truth is even more empowering. Yes, absolutely. I want to rewind for a second. For those listeners who might not know, can you share how Form Health started and what was the original vision?

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's at least my baby as much as anybody else's baby. So I love sharing the story. I just don't know how deep to go because I'll bore people.

But a good friend of mine and I, Dr. Paul Savage, met at an integrative fellowship for stem cell. And he's a mover and a shaker, an entrepreneur, a guy that's trying to change the world.

And I sort of think of myself the same way. Hey, let's change this. Let's make medicine better. And so we were convinced, and I'm still convinced. I'm sure Paul's still convinced.

that we can do better in medicine. What's happened, what we saw is that there's a whole bunch of people practicing integrative medicine. And typically it's because you go to medical school, you do your residency, you start practicing, and then you slowly become disillusioned with the reality that I'm not helping people like I thought I was going to.

I'm just managing some disease or whatever you sort of sub-specialize and I'm managing their arthritis or I'm managing their diabetes. But they're not slowly improving over the course of the care.

I'm just having their decline occur slower, right? It's just really unsatisfying. And so what happens is physicians

leave that mindset. They start practicing in a way that is really health oriented and root cause and that sort of thing, but they had to invent their own island.

That's how I always like to describe it. They came up with their own way to provide it. Well, lots of times insurance is really sort of, there's a lot of friction with insurance and doing things differently.

So that often is similar. But they'll start, you know, you might start by looking at people's hormones or start by looking at people's gut health or maybe it's their diet, right?

And so you start in a specific path and then based on the patients that come to you, you sort of become the thing that they want you to be based on. For example, for me, I started seeing patients that had chronic illness just simply because there was a young man that his father came into the office and said, hey, my son hasn't gotten out of bed.

18 months since he returned from a mission in Madagascar and he needs some help. Do you think you could figure out what's wrong? And I said, well, I'll certainly try.

I'll certainly look, right? Did a bunch of tests. He ended up having a number of different infections and we treated those and he got better. Well, then word is out that Dr.

Peterson's willing to look for things like Lyme disease or mold toxicity, right? So I became the type of patients that came to see me. But back to form health, what happens is if I invented this little version of integrative medicine and then somebody invented a slightly different one and somebody invented a slightly different one, at some point I'm going to retire and my island is going to disappear.

And we weren't bringing this knowledge together in a way that it could be self-sustaining. So, Paul and I saw that and said, hey, there's got to be something we can do to improve this because when I started into integrative medicine, I was really focused on thyroid and hormones.

And I still do those things today, but it's not the focus of my practice any longer. And so it's sort of like we need to have a group, a big enough group that we can get this rising tide will raise all of them.

This accumulated knowledge will be dispersed amongst all of them. And we'll all be better at what we do because the way I take care of people's hormones today is different than it was 10 years ago because I've been able to rub shoulders with people like Dr.

Tara Scott or Michelle Davis, right? these are experts in the field that I've been able to work with because of form health. So when Paul and I sat down and said, hey, there's gotta be a better way, there's a number of different things like this collaborative approach, doctors being able to work with each other to improve.

We're not gonna lose this institutional knowledge when doctors retire because if there's a company that is supporting these practices, they can afford to do things like add another provider, right?

It's hard to add a provider when you're paying for yourself. And I think we ran into that challenge a little bit at Forum Health, but we've been able to really overcome that knowledge gap.

I know when I started almost four years ago with Forum, we were at about seven clinics.

Building a Sustainable Integrative Network

We're at a footprint of 29 today with a virtual clinic and access to care in over 16 states, and it just keeps on growing. But I know when we started, I was so overwhelmed and in awe by the providers in our network because we had and have such incredible providers in our network.

And me being more on the business side, a lot of times our providers during our network were looking for an exit

strategy. Because at some point, like you said, we need, you know, our providers need to retire someday too.

And they had decades of this experience in functional medicine. And they do it in a unique way where somebody, it is very challenging for somebody to walk in and take over a long-standing functional integrative medicine clinic that operates under a one or two providers who have a very specific way of treating patients.

And it wasn't really scalable that way either, because like you said, you have to have the resources to bring somebody in. And so a lot of the providers in our network originally joining us were looking for that exit strategy.

And an organization, when Form Health is able to step in, we're able to help train and provide the resources so that these clinics can stay standing in those communities when a provider is ready to retire.

And so I think that's a big reason for my reason for joining Forum Health is making sure that these types of clinics stay in the communities that they're in because they are so, so valuable to them.

And it allows this type of access and care. And I know my personal journey getting into functional medicine has a lot to do with my family. And I think knowledge is power, access is power.

And I think about where some of my family would be today if they had this knowledge. when they were growing up, but one of these clinics wasn't available in my area.

So it wasn't knowledge that was shared in my community. And now it is because of Forum Health and other functional and integrative medicine providers around the country.

Yeah. And the risk with, so there's lots of these providers around the country and the risk is, okay, well, how long are you going to practice? Because if you don't have the network of support at some point, it all goes away, right?

And so you're like, oh yeah, I got this great care from Dr. Smith, but then he retired and now it's over, right? What do you do? And so one of the really major goals was that we were going to be able to make this long lasting and people's institutional knowledge wouldn't disappear.

And not only would their institutional knowledge become something that was spread across all of these providers, but also patients would say, oh good, I always have a home.

My patients used to be, I think, a lot more worried about when I might not continue to work, right? But Dr. Siebold now, quite honestly, knows what I know, probably more, right?

And I do think that these types of little islands, as I call them, can stay afloat, even if the primary initial founder leaves, but it's far less likely.

And in addition to that, and maybe this vocabulary will be too complicated, I don't know. a whole bunch of islands together, it's called an archipelago.

Well, that's far more powerful than just one island, right? The things I've learned from Dr. Roy about prostate care, the things I've learned from Dr.

Saxena about gut health, that directly impacts my patients, right? My patients actually have a better experience and more likely to get better faster because of form health.

Because when I did this exclusively on my own, yeah, I still went to conferences and I learned things. but you can only step away from your practice two times, three times a year at the most.

Well, now I have a network of physicians and we meet every month at a round table and we have a channel where we ask each other questions. I answered a question for one of the providers in Madison, Wisconsin today, right?

There's just this collaboration that is hard to create any other way. So the benefit to patients is tremendous. When you get one, you would get all of them.

Yeah, I've loved Forum Health. We've been around for six years now. And really a lot of it is thanks to one of our founders, Phil Hagerman, who he's a pharmacist, but he's a businessman that has a tremendous vision and has been willing to see us through some times that would have been maybe untenable if he didn't have as much passion for what we're doing.

Right. Absolutely. And so we've been able to weather some financial difficulties and now we're in a fantastic position as an organization that we're going to be able to continue to provide integrative care for hopefully 100 or 200 years into the future.

There's no reason why we wouldn't because we're now at a place of success where our providers know what they're doing. The support team that make sure that everything from your prescription gets to the pharmacy to your lab was ordered correctly.

That's all built. And so there's just a real sense of permanence that I don't think is, I think it can be underestimated how valuable that is long-term.

I have felt something really big recently and not just recently, but this has begun over the last probably 12 to 18 months. This has began to feel it's not just a business anymore.

It is becoming a movement where functional and integrative medicine is being more widely talked about. discussed, our patients are more educated. And I feel like with our patient base, with our network growing and having so much success that this movement for change in healthcare, because as we grow and expand our footprint, we are getting national awareness, we're getting community and local awareness.

And that is so powerful for a integrative and functional medicine platform healthcare system now at this point. Well, and it's helpful for integrative medicine at large, right?

So even if you're not, if you're a medical provider and you're not part of a group like ours, that awareness that larger groups like ours brings to this is helpful across the country.

But is it all tied? One tide raises all ships? The rising tide raises all boats. I would also say that for patients, because sometimes people look at this and they're like, that's a lot.

I don't think I want one of those PEMF mats and I don't want to take a bunch of supplements. Well, having a slightly different perspective on health, going from a disease model to a health model doesn't really require that you give up every guilty pleasure and Get up at 430 and exercise every day.

You don't have to be that zealous about changing your mindset and saying Maybe being healthy takes some action and I want to do that, right? And that's another thing that I think form health has been able to balanced nicely is to say, hey, there are patients that they're going to sort of step into this because of just a few things.

Maybe they have bloating after they eat and they've tried a few different diets and they've talked to their GI doctor and nothing's helping. And so, you know, they said, well, maybe I should do this.

And then they step into this, but that doesn't mean that they need to go to get stem cells. And it doesn't mean that they have to be tested for mold, toxin, illness or something.

Right. And so I think as a patient, if patients are listening, there are all sorts of different approaches on the menu of integrative health to say, yeah, I just need to look at healthcare differently.

And it's so ironic because the people say the word healthcare and immediately their mind goes to some medication that they take or getting their blood pressure checked or, right.

Health and care are not about pills or tests. Health is about how we live, how we feel. It's more than just the physical aspect of it. And care really, we lost that so much in medicine because I don't have time in six minutes to really form a relationship and then sincerely be connected to that patient and energetically be involved in them getting better, right?

So I think this is a return to what was once the healthcare that physicians, small town doctors that you knew and they knew you and they knew your kids and they knew your mom and they knew what street you lived on.

We're returning to those roots of saying this is really sincerely personal and whatever level of entry you want to take is acceptable.

Why Patients Need Proactive Care

Yeah, you know, this profession was around before pharmaceuticals. And it was around before hospitals. And it was currently around before insurance companies.

And I'm not trying to dog on any of those things. Thank goodness for pharmaceuticals, because they save lives. And thank goodness for hospitals, because they save lives.

And thank goodness for insurance, because it makes us able to afford things. But we've become reliant on things that have become bigger than more complicated and less effective and efficient than what they once were.

And so this is just an appropriate and natural sort of turning, swinging of the pendulum and patients need to get their power back to say, wait, I'm in charge of my care, not an insurance company, not a hospital and not, you know, particular drug manufacturer, even though those are all three things that are good and have provided good.

It's not that they aren't good. It's just that we need to have patients be in charge and doctors be their mentors, coaches, and partners in the process.

And those other three things need to be secondary. I completely agree. And it's not to say that we don't use pharmaceuticals, because we certainly do.

It's just there's a place and there's a time and necessary. But instead of in that, I don't think it's just they shouldn't be in charge, right? I shouldn't even be in charge.

I'm your physician. I'm not your dad, right? So individual patients should be in charge of what happens to their bodies. And they should look to a medical provider who they trust.

And they've built that trust because of enough time and a relationship. And there's, that's another thing about, you know, most of our offices don't accept insurance.

My patients pay me. Well, that changes the relationship in a really important dynamic. I have a moral fiduciary responsibility to my patients. They just gave me money, which is just a currency of value because they said it's worth it to me to try to be healthy.

I have an obligation to them personally. Well, if I was being paid by the hospital I used to work for or I was being paid by the insurance company on behalf of the patient, well, my responsibility is to the hospital or the insurance company as far as I really owe it to the insurance company to order the tests that they think are okay or to prescribe the medication that they call tier one instead of tier two, right?

But if If the patient and I have a relationship that's based on time and care and an exchange of value from them to me, and then from me back to them, it really is direct, right?

So I think that's important for people to understand. I do too. I completely agree. And I also think that one of the big things I see from this is that the time and the relationships that the providers and our patients build together is also

creating this empowering movement within our patients to be better advocates as well for themselves.

And it also creates a collaborative partner in their care who has spent more time with them understanding their needs and things like that. I know I still visit my primary care, but I also visit my form health provider as well.

And I get a lot more not in In a negative way, I have more time with my form health provider. I get a different level of information that I get to communicate what my needs are.

And I can take that back to my primary care or, you know, other providers that I'm working with and I can advocate for myself better as well. And I think that's really empowering.

Yes, to recognize that these two services are not competing with each other. No, not at all. Now they could at times compete with each other because I could do just as good a job or when I was practicing as a family physician could have done just as good a job helping someone with a very specific issue.

I don't think that my friends from residency who are practicing family medicine are are somehow less adequate when it comes to helping someone lose weight or pay attention to their metabolism like their hemoglobin A1c.

It's a matter of what depths do you go to and there are things that I think that seeing your primary care provider for, it does make better sense because primarily they are the director and the gatekeeper of all of the other specialists and how your insurance interacts with those things.

So if you need a DEXA scan for your bone density. Seeing your primary care provider and having it done at the local hospital so it's always on the same machine, that's important for your health.

And I can order that test, and I do for a lot of my patients, but I don't want them to feel like, well, because I'm doing this, you shouldn't see your regular family doctor.

And certainly, there are specialists that I'm certainly not going to take the place of any surgeons or orthopedists or cardiologists. There are things that I will do for your heart that the cardiologist might not pay as much attention to, but there's absolutely things that he's going to do that I want.

One, wouldn't be capable of doing and two, wouldn't even know where to begin, right? Yeah. Absolutely. I mean, we're all complementing each other. Well, it's often times called complementary medicine or integrative medicine for that reason.

And it's funny because complementary would make it sound secondary. It's just another aspect of your care. Which is why, you know, I really think we should change the name from health insurance to hospital insurance, because it's not about your health.

If you're using your insurance, it's about a catastrophic thing that you didn't expect to happen, right? That's how insurance works. It's something, it was an unforeseen thing that could happen, but probably won't, right?

Car accidents can happen, but probably won't. That's why they can insure you. If it's going to happen, it's not insurance. You're just paying ahead of time.

Right. Your health is something that if you want to have it, you got to do something about it. Right. And if you're really cavalier and casual about it, well, maybe if you have really good genetics and you're, I don't know, accidentally eating well and being active in spite of yourself, great, you'll be healthy.

But otherwise you have to be proactive about it and no amount of you can't prepay and that gets you exercise. Right. Right. You have never been health insurance.

It's only ever been hospital insurance. But then we tried to say, oh, well, let's have it do some preventive things. Well, the preventive things that you really need are pick the right foods at the grocery store and be active, right?

Do some mental health care, you know, tell people, thank you. And I love you. Yes. Yeah, absolutely. You know, I'm curious originally got like, you speak so passionately about this and obviously you've been doing this for some time.

You're one of the founders. What got you interested to begin with? Yeah, that's sort of fun to think about. So, I practice in a really tiny town in the panhandle of Texas, Wellington, Texas.

I love Wellington. If anyone from Wellington is listening, I love you guys. How about to Wellington? Yeah, exactly. Collingsworth General Hospital. It was a hospital.

We had 13 beds, three beds in the ER, right? It was a level five trauma center, which basically means it's the lowest level of trauma center. And I was one of two doctors in this town.

The other doctor was a good friend of mine from medical school and Dr. Hackey and I were it. We were the medical staff and then there was a PA that joined and then we got another PA to join.

So then we had four providers and it was amazing because it was a town of less than 2000 people. It was a long ways to get to someplace that was a tertiary care center, right?

Like a hospital system. You had to go almost two hours to get to Amarillo or three hours to Lubbock or three hours to Oklahoma City or five hours to Dallas, right?

We're pretty remote. And so you end up seeing these patients all the time for everything, right? patients don't want to drive two hours to go see a specialist for something that they could do closer to home.

So, there was a lot more care that we provided than I probably would have done as a family doctor if I was in a bigger city. And you know these people, right?

Like, people would stop me in the grocery store and say, hey, doc, I got this rash, right? Or in the line at the bank or at the football game, right? No matter where you go.

You take a look at my elbow, sir, please. Exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Peterson's Path Into Integrative Medicine

And because, you know, if you've got less than 2000 people in your town and it's 30 minutes in any direction to get to another town of 2000 people, you know, these people well, and you really start to care about them and you know, they care about you.

And so probably that helped me have a sense of connection to some of my patients that I wouldn't have otherwise had. And I had two things happening. One, I saw my failures every day.

I would suggest that in regular family medicine, if you don't have a positive impact on the patient's health within three or four visits, they're not coming back.

They're going to go see somebody else. And you never know you failed them, right? So I think as doctors, we might feel very successful because we're like, oh yeah, my patients are doing great.

Yeah, well, that's because the ones that weren't doing great went somewhere else, right? My patients didn't have that choice. Well, I suppose they could drive two hours, but they generally would not, right?

So I have to see my failures all the time. And I also had the experience of patients that I knew them personally, you know, I'd see them at church or the bank or wherever, and they would come to me and say, hey, I read such and such, can you look at this?

Now this was early at the, you know, the internet was not, you still had to listen to it, you know, dial on your phone to get logged on with America Online and stuff.

And so we weren't quite in the throes of the information age, but we were at the beginning of it for sure. when patients came in and said, can you please read this?

I think I have this problem. Maybe I had a little more time because I was in a small town. It wasn't that, you know, it's not like I was seeing 30 patients a day.

I couldn't tell them no, right? Because these are actually my friends. And so both my successes, which were things that people said, hey, I think, can you think outside the box on this one?

I was open to that. And my failures of saying, wait a minute, we did all the stuff. It didn't work. I sent them to Baylor. I sent them to UT Southwestern and they came back with the same diagnosis that they had before.

No better. They're just on a different brand of the same sort of medication. That's what really was sort of a wake up call for me to say something is wrong with the way we're delivering medicine.

And I think most doctors that do what I do had a similar story, a similar experience of saying, hey, I saw my sister go through this, or I had a health crisis, or I had a patient that spoke to me about such and such, right?

And maybe it's just a matter of saying I was in a position where listening was easier. than ignoring. Because a lot of times we're in a position where that's not the case.

And so, this is not an indictment on physicians that are, you know, busier and they don't see these things. But that was a beautiful thing for me. And there was a number of patients that could stand out.

And I suppose because of HIPAA, I can't say their names. They probably wouldn't mind. But there's one woman in particular, I still adore her. And she was the epitome of integrative medicine.

And I didn't know anything about integrative medicine. And she would come and say, well, Dr. Peterson, will you read this? I'd like to be on such and such, because it makes sense.

But it's a supplement. I need your opinion on it. I'm like, I don't have an opinion on it. But I'll read that. And then I'll make an opinion, right? So she was fantastic.

There was a cowboy. I like this story a lot. There was a cowboy that I would see periodically. And a legitimate cowboy. I mean, like we lived in a place where there was lots of ranches.

And this guy was just a cow hand. He'd come in. And he would say to me, I cannot sit down in the saddle. I'm just standing in the stirrups all day long because it hurts so bad.

And I'm like, oh, well, you've got prostatitis. And I did an exam. And yeah, sure enough, he's got a prostate infection. So I would give him doxycycline because it's the drug of choice for prostate infections, either that or a fluoroquinolone.

But so I'd put him on doxycycline. And he'd come back two months later and he's like, oh my heavens, doc, I feel so much better, totally better. But what's weird, doc, is my joint pain is gone.

My headaches are gone. I am not exhausted. All the body aches that I usually have, it's all gone. Can I just stay on that medicine? And I would say, no, you know, it's not safe to stay on doxycycline for a super long period of time.

You better not. And so then he'd go away and he'd come back in four or six months, same exact situation. brain fog, headaches, joint pain, feels terrible, and he also has prostatitis.

And I'd retreat his prostatitis and he'd get better everywhere. It was probably five or six years that it finally dawned on me, this guy has Lyme disease.

That's why he has all these symptoms. It makes perfect sense. The guy's a cowboy. He's out sleeping on the ground with his horse. Of course he has Lyme disease.

But do they have Lyme disease in Texas? Well, not according to the map on the CDC website. So those sorts of things where I'm like, wait a minute, why am I not taking better care of this guy?

There was another family that they all had mold toxicity and it never dawned on me. I kept treating them with different things. But now as an integrative physician, I can look back and I'm like, oh yeah.

That little nine year old girl, she had MCAS and I didn't realize it. I didn't know what to do for her. And neither did the specialists at the, at the hospital in Amarillo.

She just kept having worse and worse symptoms. Right. So having that experience of this little town and saying, Hey, we have to do better. Um, and it's actually a pharmacist, which I love this part of the story because now I'm partners with a pharmacist in Phil Hagerman, but it was a pharmacist who's a compounding pharmacist who came to me and came to the office and she said, Hey, we compound hormones.

We're about 45 minutes away in this other little town, but we could do hormones for your patients if you want. It would really help a lot of your patients.

And I just thought, well, that sounds nutty. Didn't do anything about it. She came back three months later and she's like, I'd really love you to go to this conference.

Right. And I'm like, maybe I'll go. And she said, well, it's already, it's paid for, you don't even have to pay for it. Right. And doctors, it's so funny.

We're like, we get well paid and we're cheap as could be. So I'm like, okay, fine. I'll go. So I go to the conference. And after that, it was, it was all dead.

It was all over. Right. I drank the Kool-Aid. I was like, wait a minute, you're telling me we can help people get healthy. Are you kidding me? We don't just have to treat their disease indefinitely.

So that was the moment. That was the moment. And I, you know, I wish I could remember her name now. It was she and her husband that ran this pharmacy.

I'll give a shout out to her too in Clarendon, Texas and changed my life and changed the lives of thousands of people that I've taken care of since then, because my eyes were finally opened that we can do better.

Yeah. Is that, I know in your clinic in Utah, you have a large population of Lyme patients. Is that one of the reasons that you got into more comfort?

That had to do with the kid that was not able to get out of bed for 18 months, probably more so than anything. And I will say this, and you can do what you want with it.

It's a God thing. I had been here in Utah for six months, eight months. I had taken care of this kid. He was still not better yet, but he was slowly getting better.

And I'm a great sleeper. I sleep just fine. And I'm in a deep sleep. And I wake up at 3 a.m. And on my brain was get on the internet, find the Lyme support group in Utah and contact the president of the Lyme support group.

And I never wake up in the middle of the night, right? We have six kids, babies would cry. My wife's up feeding them and I'm sleeping like a log, right?

So I wake up in the middle of the night with this impression. In my opinion, there's no other explanation besides God said to me, I need you to do this because there are people that need this care.

I'm going to get choked up a little bit. I got on the internet. I found the Lyme support group in Utah. I emailed the president and I said, I have taken care of a few patients that have Lyme disease and I would like to be able to provide this care.

I don't know that there are any other Lyme providers in Utah. It turns out there were already. I didn't know that. But I just want you to know that I am available.

And then she reached out to me and asked me to come and speak and introduce myself and I did all of that. Yeah, the patients found me after they found me and I didn't know they had Lyme and they didn't know they had Lyme.

We just did the tests, right? And after I had been willing to test for it, then apparently, I don't know, maybe it was clear that I was willing to do this work.

And so God woke me up in the middle of the night. I didn't see anybody and said, get to work, start helping these patients because it is a tremendously neglected and marginalized patient population, these chronically ill patients.

And it turns out, and Lyme is just one of the things, it turns out it's not all Lyme, right? There's maltoxicity, there's Epstein-Barr, there's Bartonella, there's parasites, there's all sorts of things that make us become chronically ill.

Yeah, exactly. It's another group of Kool-Aid. Yeah, my entry into being thought of as a Lyme doctor, I don't think there's another explanation besides this was what I was supposed to do.

And it's really ironic because I did my residency in Pennsylvania, which is Lyme country. And I don't think one time in residency did anybody talk about Lyme disease, right?

There might be one question on the board exams, you know, with a picture of a bullseye rash. Right. Like it is such an under appreciated, under paid attention to.

And to this day, it's somewhat controversial, but quite honestly, the people that are still holding onto the controversy there, they're just the most stubborn, in my opinion, close minded physicians out there because there's just not much controversy left.

The research is robust. The evidence is clear and the patients get better when you treat them. So now what it still needs to be tinkered with and figured out completely is, okay, how much of it is immune?

How much of it is infection? What part of the infection is really Lyme? So it's not just straightforward treat Lyme. People get better. It's personalized.

You got to do the right test. I had a person yesterday who's Their insurance company denied their disability claim. Even though he's been sick since 2013, he's seen multiple neurologists, multiple Lyme doctors, multiple sleep doctors, all sorts of doctors.

The guy doesn't feel good at all, can't function. And the, what are they called? occupational medicine doctor denied or you know recommended that that his insurance company deny the claim for his disability because he should still be able to work there's no physical proof and you're like oh my heavens are you kidding me there are 300 000 almost 400 000 people a year diagnosed with Lyme disease and we're still denying the effects it's just yeah Well, that's why, that's a big part of why I feel like form health is here.

The mission, the vision, the- Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's, that's the sort of the reason why we would start it.

Lyme Disease and Chronic Illness Care

Why Paul Savage, who was really focused more on optimal health, stem cells, hormones, and myself, a guy that was sort of married to this group of marginalized patients that are chronically ill, gut problems, SIBO, Lyme, all these chronic issues said, Hey, you know what?

There don't need to be two camps. We don't need to have the, let's just help the Uber healthy and let's just help the Uber sick. Let's put this together.

Let's do everything and let's get physicians that are, maybe they're on one side or the other of that. One's doing just the Uber healthy, one's doing the Uber sick.

Let's help them because it's the same thing that helps people become healthy. So, I love it. Periodically, I think to myself, you know, I do miss the ER, I do miss the nursing home, and you know, there's different things about that, but I don't think I could go back to those types of care at this point because there's just so much real moral good that we're doing by changing healthcare, by allowing people to become healthy rather than just fight a disease.

I agree. And I think that a lot of like the reasons that we get into this type of medicine too is really represents like the larger patient experience of wanting answers, wanting to be proactive, wanting like needing this type.

And so here we are delivering it. We're doing it. Yeah, and people deserve answers, right? I think there was a time when, quite honestly, doctors probably didn't know what the answers were either, but nobody knew they didn't know.

It's like the Wizard of Oz, right? The man behind the curtain. We certainly pretended to know a lot. You can't pretend anymore, right? Patients now have access to the truth.

They can go on the internet, they can look things up, and they can say, hey, I need this, right? I had a woman today call the office and ask for a particular lab test.

And the medical assistant came in and said, hey, she wants such and such lab test. And I was like, huh, never heard of that lab test. Let me look it up, right?

Well, imagine if we lived 25, 35 years ago, neither one of us would know about the lab tests, right? And so we have to be humble enough to listen to our patients and we have to be curious enough to find out answers.

And then we have to be intelligent enough to dig deeper once we start down a particular rabbit hole. So it's really fun. It's really exciting to be a physician at this moment in history.

It's fun to watch you guys too. So we have grown to 29 physical locations, 100 providers nationwide in our network. We have new programs and patient education and a bunch of really great stuff planned for 2026 and the end of 2025. We are Growing like crazy right now.

Where are we going? Where do you see us going next? Well, so what I like about what you're describing what we actually in my view have is some really excellent providers who do sort of deep dive really significant chronic illness teaching some other providers how to do that and then we have a much larger group of Providers who are doing sort of the beginning steps, you know thyroid hormones trying to take it to the masses online that sort of thing.

And so we're coming at it from both sides. And which is fantastic, in my opinion, because I think most companies do one thing, or one or, you know, they're not trying to do the whole thing.

And so they're gonna, yes, they will provide, I don't know, your Viagra pill for you in a convenient way that just got shipped and you didn't have to go see a doctor.

Or yes, they will pay attention to the fact that you have long COVID, but they're not trying to cover it at all. And so where I see us going is we've got a fantastic group of medical providers who are paying really good attention to thyroid care, Hashimoto's, gut health, and another fairly large group who's paying attention to and providing

hormone care in a way that's accessible to the masses.

And I think that that's going to help so many people who want to be healthy know where to start, right? And we've got that growing and getting bigger and bigger.

And then simultaneously, we've got this group of providers who has deep experience in taking care of chronically ill patients, and that knowledge is being spread down to other physicians.

And so what I see happening is providers say at our Hormones by Design clinics in Texas, putting people on hormones, getting them somewhat better, and a lot of them all the way better, but some of them, they're not quite there.

yet, but then they have the confidence and the support and the guidance to say, you know what, let me check their gut. Let's go all the way. Yeah, if that wasn't it, okay, I can either refer them to someone like Dr.

Peterson or I'll do a test for them myself. Let me check if they have mold toxicity because they mentioned that to me, right? And so we're just seeing it grow in both directions.

I hear that there's more collaboration in the future. There's more comprehensive accessible care. And I think, you know, we have some experts that if I had a problem with my prostate, I would want to go see Beth Roy in Jupiter, Florida.

And I don't know that I'm ever going to be able to provide those things because, you know, there's certain hardware like machines, things that you need to do a certain thing, right?

So, you know, for people that are part of Forum Health that have joined the network that are our patients, they're going to be able to access those things.

They might have to travel to Jupiter, Florida, but it's available, right? Then there's other things where it's not just the network of providers that you have, that you have to go somewhere else.

It's that because of the network of providers, your care is going to be better next year than it was this year, because we will all know more than we used to know, because I'm going to learn things from these other people.

I think most of my patients are like, oh my heavens, Dr. Peterson, he's so smart. But I'm only going to be smarter next year if I keep working with all of these other great doctors.

I remembered that in 2020, I think it's 2024, 2025, we had 11% of our patients seeing more than one form health provider. I have a feeling that as we grow and as our network continues to get more and more sophisticated, that we're going to see that referral or that collaboration and that number of patients who are seeing more than one form health location or provider just increase also and just And the access to our education and knowledge just also is improving us all.

Yeah, for sure that's going to happen. I know physicians here in Utah. I work with a cardiologist. He's not a provider for form health, but he's fantastic.

And people want to know, well, who could I see for my heart that actually pays attention to integrative functional medicine? Who's actually going to give me the truth about statins?

Who's going to pay attention to if I'm eating healthy? And so even outside of our network, I think we're still able to find collectively those other providers that maybe never become a provider for Forum Health, but I recommended Dr.

Paulson to a person in Columbus, Ohio yesterday, right? He's going to see Dr. Paulson. Why? Well, because I know he's a cardiologist that does things in a way that is going to have long-term impact on his first patient.

There's a lot of benefits. Absolutely. For me, it's about access and helping people realize that they have a choice in how they care for their health and getting them the education so that they can.

Forum Health's Future and Health Coaching

I feel like one of the missing pieces that I had growing up and my family had was They just didn't know. At the time, like you said, people know now. And so I think having access and having the right education and knowledge for our communities is just going to be so empowering for us this coming year and in the next few years too.

That's another thing that we're going to see grow. So we have health coaches and that's been fantastic. And the health coaches can expand the knowledge of the providers because the health coach that I used the most before she went on maternity leave recently, she worked with me.

She worked with Dr. Casebold. She worked with Dr. Taylor. And so, she knew what they knew and she knew what I knew. And so, if I sent my patient to see Victoria, they were going to get even better care because she's collaborating with a number of physicians, right?

And I think health coaches are one of the ways that people can enter a different mindset and say, oh, I don't even, quite honestly, you don't have to see me.

See the health coach. Go visit the health coach three, four, five times in a row before you even make an appointment with me. Right? Yeah. Thank you so much.

We have it, but it's getting bigger. And I think that that's going to be a tremendous asset to patients and providers alike. Huge. I'm actually speaking at the FMCA, the functional medicine coaching academy for their graduating alumni class as an ask the us for effort.

And I'm going to be talking about the future of, um, health coaching in functional integrative medicine and really health coaches, you know, There's such an important part.

I've got a heart for it because I am a certified health and life coach and business coach. But when I did some of my research and the deep dives into it and things like that to prepare for this, I mean, the amount of momentum.

Coaches are not just coaches anymore. They're becoming strategic partners for patient's care. Well, nothing needs to happen. Doctors, I can say this because I'm a physician.

We have to let our ego go and recognize that we're one of the people involved in people's care. We're not the whole story. We're not even the smartest.

It doesn't matter. What matters is that you have all the tools you need. It would be like the engine bragging to the tires that it's the most important part of the car, right?

It's ridiculous. And so when we can collaborate with across the network, health coaches and psychologists and counselors and other specialists that maybe are not as integrative, but they still have a mindset this way.

That's the kind of overarching care that people need and really should be entitled to in a system that's built well, right? We should have those choices, right?

You can only choose things that are available. We're trying to make them available, right? That's what's going to change healthcare. Put it on the menu, allow people to pick it.

So if you're a health coach listening, contact Forum Health. Collaborate with us. Whether you become employed by Forum Health or we just send people to you.

There's such a big part and that's going to be an explosive area for us next year too. Well, Dr. Peterson, it was so

wonderful talking to you today. I just want to invite our listeners to join our mission.

We can't do this without you. We can't change healthcare without you, whether it's becoming a patient or just learning, sharing the podcast, spreading awareness of proactive health.

This is a big movement and form health is a big, it was a part of it right now. And so during the movement, learn more, be proactive about your health.

It's, it's wonderful. This has been such a special conversation. One that really just highlights the heart of why we do what we do. So every time our listeners, every time you guys listen to a podcast, every time you make a change in your lifestyle or ask a better question about your health, you're helping change the face of medicine.

You are part of this mission too. And so I just want to thank everybody out there, not just Forum Health, not just our listeners, everybody who's just taking proactive steps in your health.

Bravo. Congratulations. You're making a difference in the big picture also. Yeah, it really is. The vision on health is changing and it's exciting because everyone that's paying attention is playing a part, right?

There's great books written by great scientists from all around the country and the globe. And there's great doctors that are, you know, we're standing on their shoulders, right?

And they're marching with us to try and change healthcare. One thing I will say for patients with respect to join this movement is data, information, information that's connected to something is so powerful.

One of the things that I think my patients feel good about is they know that the data that goes into my EMR is connected to the data from all of the form health providers.

And that is going to make it clear where we're not guessing is a specific therapy working, right? If we put them on vitamin D, how much impact did it really have?

Because big data can crunch that out and say, hey, this really does have the impact that we thought it did, or it doesn't, and let's stop doing it. And so patients should feel empowered that what they're doing now, it's like they're writing their own journal, their own part of the history is written into it.

If they're able to come together with an organization that's able to provide that basically for our future, right? For our children and our children's children.

So thank you for participating, all of you patients and providers out there. Thank you. And if you haven't already, follow the Forum Health podcast, share it with somebody who needs to hear it, and visit forumhealth.com to learn more about how you can take care and charge of your health.

Dr. Peterson, thank you so much for joining me today, and thank you everyone who continues to walk with us on this journey. Couldn't be here without you.

Thanks, Amanda. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health. Each day is a new opportunity to make choices that empower your well-being.

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