Introduction and Alex Howardu2019s Background

Hi. Welcome. I'm doctor Roger Murphy, and I'm the host of freedom from Fibromyalgia Summit. And I want to welcome Alex Howard. I really been looking to this this interview for quite some time and familiar with Alex's work because a few years ago I interviewed one of my first summits, one of his colleagues.

I don't know if their partners. I'll get more into it here. Just a minute of that Nicky graphics. And, so I'm really looking forward to this interview.

I'm going to give you a very short bio on Alex, and we'll go into more about his. His background is really, very interesting. But Alex is the founder of Conscious Life.

He's the co-host of the world leading Super Conference series, which has been attended by over 1 million people. He is also the founder of Optimal Health Clinic, one of the world's leading integrative medicine clinic, which has over 25 full time practitioners supporting thousands of patients in 50 countries.

He's the author of two books, and if I understand right, he's got a third book coming out later this year. The book that I'm familiar with is Decode Your Fatigue.

And we'll talk a little bit about that today. But, Alex, thank you. First of all, for so much research and time you've put into this community, trying to understand and then help these folks with fibromyalgia and chronic syndrome.

It's really a delight to have a chance to talk to you. Well, thank you for having me. I appreciate it. And, yeah, I'm excited again as the conversation together, one of the things you really focus on that some of the other speakers have have introduced in the summit, is the role that trauma plays in chronic health conditions, and particularly in the three that I just mentioned that we're in, we're kind of talking about today.

Tell us, you know, tell us, you know, when people hear trauma, they think something physical. So much more than that, isn't it? Yeah, it is. And it's interesting, you know, if we back up to the role of psychology or the role of mind body medicine in, in, in these conditions, I remember I suffered from my chronic fatigue syndrome for seven years from my mid-teens to my early 20s.

And the first couple of years of that, I was housebound at times, bedbound, and then had a, a kind of challenging but ultimately, life changing healing of a very active five year healing journey.

And if at that time you'd said to me, the people did say to me, well, it's just all in your mind. It's just, you know, it's a psychological condition, not a physiological condition.

It did a few things. Firstly, made me quite angry. So it was slightly provoking and trigger response, but it also made me feel deeply misunderstood because I knew that my experience was a real physical condition because of the symptoms I lived with day to day, you know?

What Trauma Really Means

And so I think one of the things that's very difficult for people with these complex fatigue related conditions is really getting the understanding and the support they need from the people around them.

I think that's important to say before we come into trauma and the role that trauma plays is that in no way are we saying the trauma is the cause of, fibromyalgia or that the resolution to fibromyalgia is just heal your trauma and the whole thing's going to transform.

In fact, part of the reason why I called my last book Decode Your Fatigue, was that we've got to see there's different pieces to the jigsaw. We got to decode that and clarify that.

And before we can map an effective path to recovery, we've got to first diagnose what what is really going on. So I just want to, set some of that context in frame.

So when I come back to your question around the relationship between trauma and and fibromyalgia, well, really to to answer that, we have to answer the question of, of what is trauma?

Because I think a lot of us think about trauma in more, a kind of PTSD type type trauma that we've been, you know, in a warzone or we've had a serious car accident or we've experienced of adverse childhood experiences in a more classical sense, like physical abuse or sexual abuse or so on.

And, yeah, obviously those things are traumatic, you know, but they're not the only things that are traumatic. And so I would label those as being overt traumas, things that are obviously traumatic.

But the things that often really impact us and shape us in our lives. More covert, often traumas are often more subtle. And so we the relationship between those things and physical health, which we can get into in much more detail, but they are significant.

I also I've, I've asked your question about giving lots of kind of context and definitions here, but I think it is important that the other thing that I'll say is that trauma isn't just the events.

So it's not just what happens, it's the context within which the event happens. And so it's like you can have 2 or 3 people as children go through the same basic event, but not all are going to be traumatized by it.

And so whether or not we experienced trauma from an event that happens is primarily determined by whether, core emotional needs are being met and as children, we are entirely dependent upon our primary caregivers to meet those needs for us.

As we get older, we hopefully learn to meet those needs for ourselves. And as adults, we certainly, hopefully have learned to meet those needs for ourselves.

And so just very briefly, those core needs, boundaries, safety and love. And so the need for boundaries to be able to say no or to be able to say yes both to ourselves and to other people, the the need for safety as a child, that is, to co regulate our nervous system with our primary caregivers as an adult, that's learning how to self-regulate our own nervous system.

And the need of love is not just knowing that we're loved as an idea. Like we can know our parents love us, but like, not sorry, skillful in the way that they meet that that core emotional need.

And so the really effective meeting of that need is a real seeing of a child, where they are as they are and responding to that. And an attentive, interested, caring, loving way as an adult, that is really how do we relate to ourselves?

How do we relate to our emotions when things come up? Do we give them space or do we reject them and shut them down? And so to hear back, to ask your question, what is trauma and how does it impact us?

Well, if we have not had those core emotional needs met, we likely haven't learned to effectively meet those core emotional needs for ourselves. And so we've had to develop coping strategies to be able to survive the impacts and the bumps of life, like those Kovat events that happen, which may be the.

We came home from school one day and we were sad about something, and we were told that we were being pathetic and decided to start crying about it, or we wanted to express ourselves in class.

We put our hand up because we were excited to answer a question, and everyone laughed when we got the answer wrong. Or we learned that the way to feel safe in a in a volatile household was to make everyone else's needs more important than our own.

And so we developed this chronic, helper pattern. And so we can have all of these different events that happen, but how we're set up in our core emotional needs and how we then learn to meet those for ourselves, is what determines if there is trauma that comes from those experiences.

And if there is, what then happens is our nervous system changes in response. The homeostatic balance of our nervous system will shift. We'll go into what's called a maladaptive stress response.

And sure, we can talk more about that. And then there are various outcomes in our lives. All the coping strategies we develop to manage that dysregulated nervous system.

Maybe we learn the only way to calm that is through alcohol or through drugs, or we have a pattern of chronic anxiety, or we have a pattern of chronic low mood or low self-esteem.

And what we've actually just talked about is a framework of trauma, which I call the echo model, which trauma is effectively echoes that happen in our lives, that the events and the context of the core need within which they happen, the homeostatic shift in our nervous system and then the outcomes in our lives.

So that's the framework that I use around trauma. And then, yeah, we can we can dig into to more of these pieces. So, you know, we look at some of the, you know, some of the surveys from this, this, this audience, from fibromyalgia audience.

And we see that some of the surveys here show up to 80% of them will look back and say that stress was the catalyst for their disease.

Stress, Nervous System Dysregulation, and Cell Danger Response

To me, stress is oftentimes just another word for trauma. And sometimes I find that when I'm giving, giving a talk to some groups and they hear that I, you know, share with them, I think that stress is kind of the catalyst of fibromyalgia.

And I think stress and inflammation, the catalyst for almost every chronic condition out there, but it sometimes doesn't sit very well because they, they say, oh, you know, that's, that's, that's a cop out.

That's too simple. But when you go deep down into this whole thing about trauma, you can see it starts to introduce other things that you mentioned. You talk about in your book, the cell Danger theory, which has really changed my paradigm over the last four years in regards to fibromyalgia and other chronic illnesses that I take care of.

But, so we think that we can just get over something, you know, we, we, we think that we get in a stressful situation and it could be something that's very stressful, or it could be a pattern of, of long term stress and we could just deal with it.

But there's ramifications for that physiologically, biochemically, spiritually, I mean, it it takes a toll. And it definitely changes our physiology at some point.

Yes. And I think you make a really important point here, which is also around the physiological reality of the impact of being in what I call a maladaptive stress response.

Because to go back to my my first point around people feeling misunderstood and not getting the help and support they need because they're being dismissed by someone saying, well, it's just in your mind.

It's just psychological. The distinction that I think is important to make there is there are things which are ultimately

in our mind and not real in our body.

Like an example that would be phantom limb pain, that perfect someone, someone has lost a limb and for some match, some quite tragic situation. But there's now pain in a limb that doesn't exist.

And that is a product of their unconscious, unconscious mind. And there is no physical healing that can happen because there's no limb to heal. But that's very different to having, states of, disease states effectively happening or disease states happening in the body, which are the result of certain physiological processes that may be impacted by environmental triggers or impacted by psycho emotional patterns that are happening, but they're actually measurable, real physical changes that are happening.

So so you mentioned, Doctor Robert Nabi, his work on cell danger responses is a really good example of this. That our, I'm sure many of your audience have heard of, mitochondria, which are effectively like the power stations in ourselves.

It's their job to effectively, manufacture energy and what many people aren't aware of, which is what Doctor Robert Nabi, whose work has really trailblazers understanding of, is that the mitochondria have two functions that the function of making energy, but they also have a function of danger signaling.

And so when there's some sort of threat in the either internally or in the environment, that threat message needs to be spread through our organism to make sure we can be prepared to respond to that danger.

So for example, if we go if you and I are walking down the street one day and we don't see the big lorry thundering towards us in the road, we got a big hit of adrenaline and cortisol.

So we can leap onto the sidewalk or the pavement to to escape. We need that hit of stress hormones to allow us to immediately respond to that situation.

It is our mitochondria that are spreading that that danger, signaling throughout our body. However, to do that, they have to de prioritize energy production because they can't do energy production and danger.

Secondly, at maximum capacity. And so for the survival of the organism, they're going to get squashed by lowering a minimum De, prioritize any energy production and prioritize danger signaling.

Now that's okay if that happens for 5 minutes or 10 minutes, because we can then go back to balance this. There's another way of looking at this as a key stress and chronic stress.

Acute stress. Our nervous system is designed to have a big stress response. All of our blood flow goes to our arms and our legs, and so we can be ready for action.

But then that means that the blood flow is not going to our digestion. And so that wonderful I don't know what your doctor preferences are, but steak, steak lunch. Let's say that.

What are your thoughts on a nice, healthy, grass fed steak and, mixed greens sound? How about that? Sounds perfect. I'm right there with you. So we have that for lunch.

Digesting that is not right now a physiological priority because we're about to get squashed by a truck. And so all of these systems start to shut down.

That's designed for short term immediate danger or threat. The problem is when that acute stress response becomes chronic. And I think this is one of the pieces which to me is so important in the understanding of, of, of complex fatigue related conditions.

So this is something that I understood in sort of lived experience on my recovery. But it took me years to understand clinically, you know, working with people with fatigue for the last 20 years, the real realization that, yes,

there are stress factors in getting sick in the first place.

So we talked about the echo framework of trauma and how that can have an impact in this regulating our nervous system, and that's a big part of it. But also suffering from a medically unexplained illness when we don't know what's wrong with us.

Yeah. We don't know why it's wrong with us. We don't know if we're going to recover. We don't know if we should rest, if we should push through. Every person you speak to has got a different piece of advice, often completely conflicting.

That's why I ask you about the diet. Like there are people that say you need to eat raw food, people that you need to be on a carnivore diet. People say you need to do food combine.

Like if you read enough books, you any anything. Basically because it will be so overwhelming and so confusing. And so this deep uncertainty within the fatigue related conditions in of itself is a massive stress factor.

Yeah, because effectively our whole nervous system is going into a survival response. Something as simple as getting invited to a friend's wedding is not, oh my god, my friends getting married.

How wonderful, exciting will I have the energy if I can't go? Well, they will they not talk to me again because I let them down. And if I go, will I be able to get the rest?

I need the food I need. What will people think? So almost everything in life becomes a significant trigger to our nervous system. It isn't necessarily that a maladaptive stress response has caused someone to get fibromyalgia.

It may be a factor. I talk about loads on a boat, and it may be one of the loads that have been a factor in it have been too much, but what it fairly consistently does do is puts our body in the exact opposite state to what it needs to be to be able to heal.

And so dangerous Bones is an example of some of the science around that. And so to be able to support the healing process, we need to cultivate the factory, reset the nervous system, and cultivate a state where our mitochondria are making energy not dangerous.

Signaling my digestion is getting its blood flow so we can absorb the nutrients from the food that we eat. We find that when there's an amount of adaptive stress response that often much more reactive to the very treatments that they want, they should help them.

Like taking supplements we find in the clinic that that many people are very intolerant to a lot of the things that are going to help if we calm the nervous system, that has a big impact in shifting that.

Normalization, Childhood Patterns, and Chronic Overdrive

And so there's lots of different places where learning to reset and calm the nervous system is critical both to healing the impacts of the past, but also getting into the state that's actually going to allow the body to to do its healing work.

So we we definitely have a psychological effect to this. There's no way around it. You can't you can't detach. You can't separate the body from the mind.

But we you know, we that's been a debate for centuries. And, you know, the research is pretty clear. Although we still, I think, have a long ways to go to really get that out into the public and get everyone to really realize your thoughts, create chemicals, which create part of what happens physiologically in your body.

And if you're if you if you want to just do a simple experiment and I use this example, go sit in a theater with, you know, a hundred other people watching a horror film.

You know, it's not real. But if you're like me, you're ready to jump out of that chair and get out of that theater because you can feel your adrenaline, you can feel these chemicals being released.

But that's no different than being in a stressful household or being in a stressful workplace. Those chemicals are being released, and they're creating potential problems if they're not dealt with.

And with fibromyalgia. Your nervous system, the, part of your autonomic nervous system that is over vigilant and the calming part of your nervous system, the parasympathetic system, is basically kind of shut down.

So what Alex is talking about is trying to get a balance here so we can help to turn off this, this danger response. Yeah. And just to add to that, which I think is an important piece of this jigsaw as well, is one of the amazing things about the human organism is that we will normalize to whatever becomes our reality.

And so you can go through an incredibly difficult that's messed up. We get sent to prison, and we're going to assume in this example that they're innocent that first time, first few nights is a massive, incredibly traumatic.

And then over time one starts to normalize to the environment they're in. Same with fibromyalgia. You know, if you said to me when I first got coronary, I remember actually when I first got diagnosed with with with my, my GP, my grandmother asked my GP how long will it take to recover?

And he said it could be 3 to 6 months. And that felt like a life sentence. If you told me I was going to be seven years from that point, I don't think I could have comprehended what what that meant.

But of course, we normalize to whatever becomes our consistent reality. Now, the problem with that, when it comes to understanding a dysregulated nervous system, is we normalize to being dysregulated.

Therefore, we don't realize it's happening in the first place. So your example of going to watch a horror movie at the cinema, you kind of go in knowing what's going to happen.

It's like super intense. So if it's a good film, it's super intense for that time, and then you come out and your nervous system recalibrates on the other side.

And that was like a peak in, in, in the day to day of the system. But what happens with, with trauma and what happens with, with, with our nervous system becoming dysregulated is it's a gradual thing that happens over time.

So we might be aware of having anxiety or we might be aware of of feeling numb, or we might be aware of feeling, hypersensitive. Yeah. But we again, we normalize to it and if we don't realize what's happening, it's very hard to do anything about it.

I remember, you know, doing clinical work, especially in the early years before we kind of got more of this, this understanding out that. And people would come in and they'd be so wired in their nervous system that I could feel my nervous system activating, sitting across from them, because I'd be sort of so adrenalized and speaking so fast.

And I'd start to talk about what what we've just been talking about, and they would say, you know, they could see it in other people, but that wasn't their reality because they and they'd be sort of swinging back and forth in the chair.

There was so much adrenaline that was coursing through their nervous system because they normalized being in that state. And it's a really important first step when it comes to learning to to reset the nervous system, to recognize what's actually happening at the moment, right, to start to have the awareness of what the different triggers are, what the different thought patterns are, what's actually happening.

And I think that's where really understanding the impacts of childhood trauma can be important, not the understanding what happens in happened in the past necessarily changes that now, but it helps us look for those patterns showing up now, which then allows us to start to unhook ourselves from them and start to work to to create change in our system.

I think part of it is changing the paradigm that I know I grew up with. I grew up in a very most of my family was in medicine, conventional medicine, obviously, took a different direction and practiced functional medicine, a little bit different.

But I think the paradigm is, you know, you just kind of put up with things and eventually you get sick enough. You go to the doctor, they give you a pill and you're good.

But, you know, in with a chronic illness like fibromyalgia, oftentimes it is kind of like use the frog in the water bucket. You know, if you put the if you get a frog and you throw him in the boiling water, he jumps out, you know, but if you put that frog in this lukewarm water, it feels good.

And you start slowly turning that up and they start getting a little uncomfortable. But it's okay. We'll just deal with it's okay. But eventually the frog is fried in this pot and it's really no different.

People start to develop these warning signs, which is what a symptom is. Something's wrong. Something's not working right. Could be headaches. It could be poor sleep.

It could be bloating, gas, indigestion, irritable bowel, whatever. These are warning signs that something's not working in your body correctly and trying to get your attention.

But unfortunately, most people don't even take time to really get in touch with their inner self, so they're not even. They're so detached that by the time they finally wound up with all these different symptoms, then, as you said earlier, oftentimes you're kind of, you know, led to believe that it's all in their head.

It's not they just they've got a lot of symptoms that have developed. It's also what you're saying is a really good example of how trauma plays into this. So examples of how this may go is that as a child, what we perhaps learned was that other people's feelings were more important than our own, and that there wasn't support for how we felt.

Maybe your loved for how you help and support other people. Maybe safety comes from looking off, right? But emotional safety comes from looking after everyone else, or love comes from what you do and what you would change.

And so in the years leading up to to developing symptoms of fibromyalgia, maybe there were symptoms from your body that you started to feel more tired than than perhaps you expect to.

You started to get some some low grade pain that could come and go in some places or, you know, whatever those early signs were, and as opposed to going, wow, my body's telling me something and I need to understand this and to investigate this and get some kind of work out what's going on.

Our pattern, we learn, is that our feelings on important. So we're going to ignore it. Or we learned that your love for what you do and what you achieve.

And we're doing well in our job and achieving our job of winning that love feels more important than listening to the symptoms in our body. And so it isn't just the trauma, these emotions or impacts held in our body and nervous system.

It also has set up the inner landscape within which we respond to what's happening.

Breaking Trauma Patterns and Resetting the Nervous System

And one of one of the pathways that is only one of but one of the pathways I see into, into fibromyalgia is that taking that achieve a pattern, love comes from what we do and what we achieve.

And so we constantly push, push, push, push, push our body keep saying stop, stop. We keep pushing through and then we crash. And of course of other factors going on there as well.

But then what do we do? We try and use the same strategy to recovery. So we try and constantly push our way to recovery. So we have a constant boom and bust cycle that we get a little bit more energy than we try and do all the things we haven't been able to do over the last weeks or months, and then we crash again.

Then we rest and and so it's another, I think, important example of, yes, there's impacts in trauma in loads on the boat of unresolved emotional trauma, getting sick in the first place.

There are impacts in our nervous system. There are impacts in how we respond to life day to day. But is also impacts in how we approach the recovery path.

And if we approach the recovery path in the same way that we approach life that played a factor in getting sick in the first place. We just it's almost crazy making.

We just find ourselves going round and round in circles. So you just describe every patient I've taken care of in the last 22 years, you know, because I talk about, you know, you know, type A's, these are the doers.

They do and they do and they do and they do and they do. And then one day they're done out, and then they expend a tremendous amount of energy, which I applaud them from being proactive.

But they spend a tremendous amount of energy as a Type-A trying to figure out what's the best diet, what's the supplements to take, what's the drugs need to be taking it?

And they go off on all these different, paths that rarely yield what they really need, which is, number one, permission to just slow down and and be receptive to the universe, I think is part of it.

But there's so there's so gung ho and finding the simple solution and it's not simple. And then the caregivers, these are the type, you know, the people that that give and they give and they give and they give.

I take care of a lot of doctors, a lot of nurses, a lot of folks in the health profession. But you could be you could be the health giver in your family.

Everybody turns to you when they need something. And you give and you give and you give. And then one day you have given out. And yet when you do a consult with me and I ask you, you know, are you ready to take this journey with me and do the steps we need to do?

And there's an investment or, you know, there's time investment or money investment or whatever it is. Then you say, well, I don't know, I, I don't, I don't I have to save my time for my grandkids or I have to save, that money to, you know, to be able to give to my kids whatever it is.

So you've just described, you know, people that I take care of, this is. You're so correct. They're in that they are in that pattern and they can't get out of it.

So how does someone get out of that pattern? Yeah. So I think the first thing is we just have to name it. Right. Like having real awareness of what's happening.

You know, why do I often talk about it is that if you can see it, you don't have to be it. So if you can see that this is the pattern that's going on, the saying it is no, stop it by itself, but it opens up the recognition that we need to do something different.

Yeah. So open up it a bit more broadly. I know your question was around how to break those patterns, but if we open the question up more broadly to how how do we heal the impacts of trauma, this is one piece of that bigger jigsaw.

So I have a framework called the Reset Framework, which is the heart of my online program, the reset program, which we've actually just been talking about.

The first step, which is to recognize which is the R of I like acronyms. So we've got the echo model, the reset program. So we need to recognize what's happening.

Yeah. The next steps we have to examine what are the origins. What are the how are these what's where does it come from. But also how do these patterns show up moment to moment.

They say like what's the lived experience of these patterns? We then have to have a way of breaking the momentum of those patterns. If we look at it from the point of view of neuroplasticity, that we train our brain through doing things again and again and again to have consistent habits and patterns that that we run.

And some of these patterns can just feel like who we are, but they're not who we are. They just what we learned to do in the past, not in a sense, is a load of habits, of things that have been conditioned.

And so if we can recognize what's happening, we can examine how it's playing out. We then have ways of stopping and breaking those patterns. And there are various techniques from NLP and mindfulness and so on that that can help us do that.

So to stop the patterns, we also need to practice going back to these three core emotional needs. If we didn't get good Co regulation with our primary caregivers of our nervous system, probably going to have to learn how to self-regulate our own nervous system.

Meditation, movement, practice and so on can be very helpful in doing that. So we recognize, we examine, we stop, we break the pattern. We then need to do the deeper emotional healing.

One of the reasons why I'm nervous system activates and speeds up in the first place, is to escape from the feelings that we don't know how to hold, and we don't know how to feel.

So by definition of slowing down the nervous system, we start to feel those things. And this is why I think it's problematic when people have somewhat one dimensional ways of working with just stopping the thought patterns without dealing with the underlying emotions, because you spend your whole life trying to stop the thought patterns, because what they're really about is escaping from from those deeper feelings.

And so the second way of reset is we need to do that emotional healing. We need to learn to hold, to feel, to process and metabolize all our emotions.

A lot of the kind of popular psychology movement of the last 20 years has really been, how about bypassing emotions or trying to flip them to positives?

My experiences to do real healing work, we have to process. We have to learn to heal those emotions. Then the t of of reset is we then have to transform our relationship with ourselves, because the real one of the impacts of all of this is if we weren't related to in loving, attentive, and skillful ways, we likely are not relating to our self in loving and kind and skillful ways.

And so we've got a vicious inner critic. We're constantly pushing ourself. Going back to your point around achiever patterns, helper patterns. And so to break those patterns, but also really to heal the impacts of trauma, we've got to recognize what's happening.

There's also lots of different facets to that. We've got to examine the way it's showing up. We've got to stop those patterns.

Putting the Fibromyalgia Puzzle Together

We've got to learn to self-regulate on nervous system. We've got to do the emotional healing, and then we have to transform our relationship with ourselves.

Yeah, yeah. So you know, this, these folks often say are tired and tired. So they're just to have this internal stress that comes out sometimes as anxious or irritable, you know, feel anxious and, but and they have this energy, this nervous energy that they don't know what to do with.

But that's exhausting. And I think that a lot of times, again, as I said earlier, I think they're just detached from who they are. We don't take we were so for so busy being human doings that we don't take time to be human.

Do human human beings and I talk a lot about I think I probably shared this a few of these interviews, but I find it's so important. My patience is you really got to make time for that quiet time.

That's the only time, really, you can get in tune with what's going on inside of you. And you've shared so well about people using, you know, different, you know, not so healthy habits, whether that's, you know, drug drugs or alcohol or whatever it is to to kind of dampen these feelings when really feelings are buried alive, you know, don't do you any good.

You really need to be able to acknowledge those feelings and see what they're all about, and be able to experience them and then move on from it. And that's not an easy thing to do.

Yeah. And, you know, adding in there as well, what I'm about to say is, is, for some people will be a massive oversimplification of some people just won't be what's part of that.

And for some people, I think it is part of it, which is that when we have emotions that are not being expressed emotionally, they can express themselves physically.

There can be a summarizing of those emotions in the physical body. And so one of the things that can be happening with the pain element of fibromyalgia is that there is unprocessed emotional pain, which is then expressing itself as physical pain.

Now the mechanisms of that can sometimes be very simple. It's actually just tension in the body, like we're holding on because we're we're bracing ourselves against those unprocessed emotions.

That constant rigidity and holding on after a while starts to trigger a pain in the body. But it can also be, somewhat more, metaphysical in a sense that that there is emotion that is held within us.

And over time, it still seems to be toxic and having an eroding impact in terms of our system. So one way of looking at it is there's no downside to doing emotional healing work.

You can have it, you need to pace it, and you need to go gently and not approach it with your achieve a pattern and push through that. And for some people, doing that emotional healing work and learning to self-regulate their nervous system is that it is the jigsaw.

It's the thing that turns everything around. For some people, it's a piece of the jigsaw and other pieces need to happen. Yeah. And also for a lot of people, the reason why it's a piece of the jigsaw is it allows the other things that they're doing to then be effective the supplements, they can't tolerate, the nutrition program that they can't stick to.

These other pieces that are really important parts of the jigsaw get unlocked because the nervous system is now in a calm, relaxed, healing state. And what it's not doing is constantly saying everything is a threat and a danger, and therefore the immune system reacting like something is going to harm us when actually it's there to help us and and to heal us.

You know, I like your analogy about the jigsaw puzzle. I use that quite often. You know, but I kind of feel like this part of it, the trauma part of it, getting in touch with your feelings and being able to have that journey, with yourself.

That's the glue that holds the puzzle together. Because in your book and you talk about this in your book, decode your fatigue. There's different triggers that bring on fibromyalgia.

We're talking about right now. The, the, the mind body connection. But there's also, you know, Lyme disease and muscle toxins and serotonin deficiencies and other deficiencies, hormonal deficiencies, low thyroid that can be part of putting the puzzle together.

Find it and then fix it. That's the beauty of functional medicine. We really are like detectives we're looking for. What's the cause of your symptom? Not just to give you a supplement or not to give you a drug to suppress a symptom?

We want to know what's causing that symptom. And for everyone with fibromyalgia, this can be something different. You know, there's some commonalities, but putting that puzzle together is one thing.

But then you got to keep it together, because if you don't keep it together, all it takes is another stressful situation. And now you trigger that same danger response or, you know, the trauma response and it all falls apart.

And this is part of what we see with, you know, fibro flares. So it's a you know, it's really putting the puzzle together. And then to hold it together so you can navigate life's day to day stress.

We all have stressors as part of life. You know, stress can be good and bad. There's some get good. Sometimes it's some of the reason why some people get a bad, you know, the stress of losing their job.

So there's stress can be a good thing too. But I really think using your, your analogy, I think this component holds it all together. I think you're right.

Resources, Books, and Closing Remarks

And I want to amplify that point further by saying that having a diagnosis of fibromyalgia or having a diagnosis of asthma or chronic fatigue syndrome, a Lyme disease or co-infections, ever, it might be slightly different with Lyme disease and co-infections, because at least you've got, a clear infective agent that you can, you know, you can measure sick people and even so that there's still lots of people with Lyman and, and co-infections and so on.

But the the effective path to recovery is not just that piece of treatment. Yeah. They've got to look at the wider context with which it sets. But chronic fatigue syndrome, particularly lends itself to the point I want to make where it is not a diagnosis, it's a diagnosis of exclusion.

If we can't find any other reason, then we'll just go. You go in and say, I'm tired all the time. I we'll call it chronic fatigue syndrome on the end.

Like that's a diagnosis, but it's not a diagnosis. Just like irritable bowel syndrome is not a diagnosis based on all this effort cited. Right. So it's based on why it's like that.

So your point I think is incredibly important that to have an effective path to recovery, we've got to get diagnosis. And getting a diagnosis of fibromyalgia is not a diagnosis.

It's a label for a set of symptoms that you're experiencing that you meet certain diagnostic criteria. But don't say anything about why you have those symptoms.

And until you have clarity on that, you simply can't unlock that pathway, that it's a healer. And as much as I'm a great advocate of why the psychology piece is incredibly, incredibly important, the reason why all psychology team works alongside a team of functional medicine trained nutritional therapists is you've also got to integrate these other pieces.

This is why, you know, summits like this are really important because it brings together these different perspectives and pieces of the jigsaw to help people get closer to really having the clarity of what's wrong, which then allows you to map that path to a healing and recovery.

Yeah, Alex, we're going to have to wrap it up I hate it. This is this is great. I'd love to spend some more time together, but I want to make sure that we have enough time that you can mention a little bit about what you're doing.

I know you've got another book coming out this year. I want to encourage people to decode your fatigue is, what little I've had a chance to read so far is really interesting.

Highly recommend it. How can people find out more about you and your work? Yeah. Thank you. Simplest place to go to is my website, Alex howard.com. And there you'll find signposts to both, the reset program.

You can sign up for a free three part video series that goes into much more detail of what we've been talking about together, about self danger response, and about how the maladaptive stress response impacts on fatigue related conditions.

You find out more on the health clinic, as I say, our practitioner training program, training people in the psychology work that we do. But also just something else that's worth checking out.

I my great passion project is, a YouTube series called In Therapy with Alex Howard, where we filmed people's real life therapeutic journeys with me. We filmed the sessions, and then we release an episode each week on YouTube.

So if you want to get a sense of not just the science of how trauma impacts us, but what the actual therapeutic healing journey looks like, that's a great place to go to, to see that in action.

Fascinating. I mean, great. Thank you so much, Alex. It's been a really, really been a lot of fun. I really enjoyed it. And look forward to, connecting again in the future.

Thank you. I really appreciate the conversation. Roger. Thank you for.