The Trauma Of Being Ill: How COVID Impacts Your Mood Disorders & Chronic Fatigue Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to Trauma and Long Haul

If you are already a person who was struggling to begin with before COVID, say you grew up with ACEs and or there was again generational patterns of trauma and, or you're in ongoing stressful situations with unhealthy relationships or a job that you hate or financial insecurity or whatever it is, then you were much more susceptible to getting any kind of long-term illness.

whether it's cancer or long-haul COVID or anything else. But the good news is we can reverse that. This is Doctor Talks. Welcome to this episode of the Long Haul Chronic Fatigue Summit.

I'm very excited to have with me today my friend and colleague, Dr. Margaret Christensen. This is going to be a very interesting conversation. Dr Margaret is gonna talk about the role of trauma in long haul and how to heal it.

Dr. Margaret, will you introduce yourself to our audience? Sure. Sure, I'm Margaret Christensen. I am one of the co-founders of Carpathia Collaborative, which is in Dallas.

And I've been in the functional medicine realm for the past 22 years. Even before that I was an OBGYN and I already did integrated obstetrics and worked with midwives and out of hospital births and that kind of thing.

have always had a big profound belief in the body's ability to heal itself and to do its normal functions. And I got sick myself 22 years ago, could not get better with how I was trained.

My children were also sick. Two of them now as adults have continued to be incredibly sick and in that process of trying to feel myself, which I did, I found out I had had lot of environmental toxicity, mold poisoning in particular, but also trauma also played a role in perpetuating a lot my symptoms.

And it's an area that we deal with a lot at Carpathia when we're working with any client with chronic illness of any sort.

Dr. Margaret Christensenu2019s Background

Great. Well, thank you for that. Let's dive right in and talk about the role of trauma and this global, global trauma that We've all been in through this pandemic.

Start by telling us, what are some of the important emotional and psychological effects of dealing with long haul? Well, with any type of chronic illness, oftentimes, again, you don't feel good.

You have such bad energy that you can't get up and do the things that You know, be the type of spouse that you want to be or you may have trouble at work.

And so all that can exacerbate anxiety and depression symptoms. There's a part of the brain that I'm not sure if anybody has talked about it before on this particular summit that's called the limbic system.

Our limb system is the reptile part, the part that runs all of our systems unconsciously. So what happens when you are chronically ill, chronicaly stressed, chronicly distressed, your limbic brain gets turned on, that's running constantly, fight or flight all the time, and it's what's controlling all of your body's responses.

And so that often keeps you in a state of chronic anxiety and PTSD. So, what we are seeing with COVID is this massive global anxiety that has been promoted.

And also because of things like masking and mandatory shutdowns and isolation, all of those things can also very strongly impact our limbic system and our brains and thoughts and can exacerbate any type of underlying emotional distress that you might be having.

Thank you. So now, Dr. Margaret, nobody has spoken about the limbic system here. Okay. Feel free to just explain that. Sure. Yeah. I think that this is so important because understanding how fear triggers our limbic brains and keeps our bodies in a state of dysregulation is really important because there are some simple steps that we can take that can help move ourselves out of limb system dysfunction or impairment, as Annie Hopper calls it, and into using the calmer parts of our brain.

So the limbic system is the part of the brain, again, that we call the reptile brain. This is, this is a part the of brain that runs every body system in the body unconsciously.

So, you know, we don't think about breathing. We don' t think of our heart beating. That's all just happening. And so the system, there's three major components to it.

The hypothalamus, That's the part that, again, receives all the signals from the body and then sends signals to the pituitary gland and other parts of the to say, yes, it's okay.

It's time to sleep.

How Trauma Affects the Limbic System

it It is time for our bowels to move. That is all being governed by the hypothalamus and inputs into that. So that's part of Olympic system. The other part o the Olympic System, there's three major parts I'm going to talk about, and this is oversimplification, but it does for the explanation here.

The other part of the system is called the hippocampus. And the Hippocampsus is our memory center. Because we have a bias towards negative emotions from an evolutionary standpoint, we remember trauma and bad things happening more than the good stuff.

That tends to be kind of a, one of the things that helped kept us alive, you know, back when we were caved in, and a tiger was chasing us, was to remember, okay, if we see the grass moving, that might be a Tiger, so we better run.

But what if the gas grass is moving is just a mouse? You know? But our, our hypothalamus, I mean, the hippocampus says, Oh, oh, he's seen that before.

Smells also are a huge piece of hippo campus. When we smell things and we have memories. So that's the memory center of the brain that holds on to negative emotions and remembers oftentimes dangerous things or traumatic things more than it tends to remember the good stuff.

And so now we have the hypothalamus running all the systems and the hippocampus remembering maybe that smell is not so good for us or that particular food.

Then the other part of that limbic system is called the amygdala. And the amygdala is what's constantly scanning the environment and look, you know, uh-oh, is that tiger going to jump out from that grass?

And, and the Amygdalas sends the signals down to your adrenal glands to say, hey, run or fight, fight flight or freeze. So the hypothalamus, the Amygdali and hippocampus are all part of the, limbic part, of brain, which is kind of deep in the brain and brain stem that regulates all of our body's function.

Unconsciously. When it gets triggered, it's running you all the time. And unless you are aware of that, you can be in a chronic state of anxiety and or depression and, or PTSD.

That is part of what keeps it fueling. So that's a very little primer in limbic system, but it is unconscious. If we can

learn how to move out of the unconscious limb system and into the conscious prefrontal cortex, into thinking executive function part our brain, Oftentimes that can help diminish all the different impacts in our body's physiology from the limbic system.

So all of the traumas that each of us have been recently as a whole in society, I think that's really been, it's got an impact on our brain. It's impacted the limbic Yeah, you know, this is huge.

And again, the limbic system keeps us in fight or flight, and you can't heal. You can repair when your body is thinking it's got to run away from that tiger.

It's not going to be using your resources to repair yourself. There's a fight, flight or freeze. The freeze response is the depression piece that I can get up and move.

I'm hopeless. Just whatever. So, you know, I think that the impact of trauma in this whole thing has not been discussed well enough. The trauma of isolation, the trauma to our children and our teenagers of missing school, missing social events, again, being isolated, stuck nothing but with this.

And I'll talk about this a little bit more, too, about how that perpetuates and how addiction to social media and cell phones can perpetuate some of this trauma.

But again, not being able to go to places of worship, et cetera. That has been a huge piece of what's going on. Again, fueling that limbic dysfunction.

And I know this whole conference too, you're talking about long haul and somebody's been talking bout mitochondria, I'm sure, and the cell danger response.

Yes. Okay, so that when our brains are constantly under distress, the part of the brain that produces energy, actually every cell in our body is called the mitochondria, and they start to malfunction and then you can get all the fatiguing symptoms and the and brain fog and all these other physiologic symptoms.

So trauma can impact us at many different levels. Down to the level of this cell at the Mitochondria and then, again, at this level of the limbic system, and collectively in our relationships, et cetera.

And by trauma, I'm not talking about just witnessing or being involved in violence, although that is massive. That's huge. What we see on the television all the time is nothing but violence.

Violence. sells commercials, don't participate. And so that the trauma of not being able to be with our families of so much division, so many division.

You have the vaxxers and the anti-vaxxer and that, you know, the splits in the family, this splits and our colleagues, that splits medicine. So the the, trauma believing one thing and then somebody else is doing something that is contrary to your belief, that has been a huge piece.

And what we have seen is way increased levels of suicide, domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, and just, you know, deaths in general going way up because people have been living in this state of anxiety and fear for so long on top of feeling really crappy.

Right. You bring up these splits, right, these divisions in society, family, in colleagues, It's really like there's splits everywhere we look. And I think prior to this pandemic, of course they were there as part of humanity, but this is pandemic has really amplified the divides in society.

I mean, I'd think that that is a huge trauma. Then that does, as you're saying, impact the brain, impacts the cells. So we're now all walking around a little different.

Global Stress, Isolation, and Chronic Illness

than we were feeling divided, feeling isolated. And so… And then if you have symptoms like fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue already, and you're in constant fight or flight distress, that is going to amplify all of your symptoms.

Again, That is how I got into this, is my own severe chronic fatigue fibromyalgia, which I know you were talking about during the summit. And certainly we see that both with COVID and with the vaccine, we are seeing a triggering of Epstein-Barr virus, can be one of the underlying causes of chronic fatiguing and fibro myalgia.

So this reactivation of viruses because we're suppressing our immune systems. When you're really distressed and you've had, you know, trauma, then you are suppassing your immune system, allowing you to be even more susceptible to getting sick or getting ill and to being swayed.

more susceptible to believing that somebody has the answer. So that is all part of contributing to the kind of the greater awareness that a lot of people are having is this cognitive dissonance within themselves.

You are doing something that might be against your will, or again, you're hearing things that don't make sense. A lot people who grow up, and we can talk about early childhood traumas too and how it can impact this, but if you grow, for example, in an alcoholic family system, Oftentimes, there is this sort of veneer that everything is okay on the surface.

And when you're out in public, you don't show any of your dirty laundry. You hide stuff. If you are a kid or a teen in school, and you know that you can't bring anybody home because mom will be drunk on a floor or dad will yelling and screaming at somebody.

So that cognitive dissonance of having to live with a smile on your face, or again, doing something that don' really want to do when there's new information that's come along, that doesn't agree with what you've been told or what your belief system is, and that can set up a lot of anxiety and a lots of distress.

So again, there's all this cognitive dissonance that's been going on around this and this belligerent demonizing of each side against the other. is part of, again, impacting our levels of trauma and PTSD.

If you have any kind of early childhood trauma too, you're also more susceptible to being impacted in this way. So that was a roundabout way, I hope I answered your question.

You did. Thank you for sharing this with us. These are the most intimate, intimate topics of our mind and our heart right now. And you hear it a little bit in conversations with friendships.

close friendships only, right? Only friendships that are trusted because people are starting to even feel that they can't trust the people that used to be able to trust.

So the fact that you're bringing this to the public right now, Dr. Margaret, this is a big deal. I haven't heard people speak about this so much publicly.

So this cognitive dissonance, this feeling that maybe what you've been told isn't what intuitively sits with you, or maybe you changed your mind. We're allowed to change our mind from one way to the other because we're we're in constant evolution as individuals and as a society.

So hoping we can find this place of freedom within ourselves and that we could extend to those around us to be able to have a different opinion, change our minds and to accept those around us who might have a different opinion as well to see the best in each human hair down the walls that are making this war between this mental, emotional, psychological war, between people and society right now.

And maybe I can also talk a little bit about generational trauma and the impact of what we call ACEs or adverse childhood events also on long-term health.

Again, whether you have chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, long haul, you've got Lyme disease, or you got cancer, it

doesn't matter. We know that if you're exposed to what are called adverse child events, again, that's witnessing violence, yourself having violence directed against you.

parents that were absent or completely neglectful. Even things like food insecurity are all pieces of the trauma. And then certainly we have, you know, now an entire generation of children who are growing up doing drills at school.

So what happens if the shooter comes in? You know, so all of that can impact you and it can change your genetics, it's called epigenetics, is where stress hormones and or chemicals can attach to our DNA and be passed on from one generation to a next and can can affect the next generation.

ACEs, Generational Trauma, and Epigenetics

So for example, we know that that children of survivors of the Holocaust, particularly those who are in concentration camps, have much, much higher rates of depression than the background population.

And part of that is epigenetic. So I'm speaking to that because as a daughter of a Polish Catholic resistance movement father, so my father at age 17 was working for the Polish underground resistance movements against the Nazis.

There was something in me my father, who was arrested at age 17, and he was a Polish Catholic, not a Jew, arrested by the SS in Gestapo and taken to Auschwitz, where he there for six months, then he went to Mauthausen, which was the concentration camp in Austria.

So for two years, from ages 17 to 19, my father was in concentration camps. And so I grew up with a man with untreated PTSD. God damn it, there's nothing god damnit bloody wrong with me.

There's no thing wrong. But he would have these episodes of rage. We didn't have a name for it until well into his 80s, understanding, oh, that's what this was.

And that what we grew up with, no different than growing with alcoholism or any other type of abusive situation that can impact your genetics and impact the way your mitochondria express themselves.

I don't know if anybody's talked about mitochondrion and the fact that all of our mitochondrial come through our maternal line. Talk about it, Dr. Margaret.

Yeah, yeah. So, okay, I'll come back to that. And I will just finish this thought here that there was something in me right when this whole thing started.

when we're hearing all these reports out of China and all this, oh my gosh, all those were, you know, fear, this and that. And it's like, something here is not right.

Something here it not, right? And there was this intuitive knowing in me because growing up, when I figured out at nine years old and I got ahold of some of my dad's book about what happened in concentration camps and saw some the pictures of the deadly experiments and the horrific things that they did and understood the level of trauma my father experienced, and understood how that's impacted me and even my own children in terms of how they changed our genetics and DNA.

It was huge. So let's go back. I'm going to elaborate on mitochondria and maternal experience. Yeah, so people may know about Lucy. That was the oldest humanoid or human skeleton that was found back in Africa back back, in the day.

And the reason they could figure out that she was oldest oldest, human ancestor is because they were able to look at some of the mitochondria in her bone DNA.

So mitochondrion has its own DNA, separate from our nuclear DNA. So the nucleus of the cells basically holds the

blueprint for our entire body and for whatever cell that is in there, the DNA turns into that.

The DNA in the mitochondria helps make you new mitochondrion. That DNA only comes from your mother. and it only comes from the maternal line. So the mitochondria that we have expresses our maternal DNA back through eons of time.

And so one of the questions I ask all of our clients is, how stressed was your mother when she was pregnant with you? Again, the trauma and stressors that our mothers and our grandmothers and great-great-grandmathers experience, so knowing something about our personal histories can be useful because those can epigenetically carried on and energetically.

I don't know if you have Dr. Klinghardt speaking, but he talks all about the energetic level of It's quantum physics. There's nothing woo-woo about any of this, but our mitochondria and our DNA can carry dysfunctional energy patterns from generation to generation, unless you're aware of that.

Again, so if you are already a person who was struggling to begin with before COVID, Say you grew up with ACEs and or there was again generational patterns of trauma and, or you're an ongoing stressful situations with unhealthy relationships or a job that you hate or financial insecurity or whatever it is.

Then in your, you are much more susceptible to getting any kind of long-term illness. whether it's cancer or long haul COVID or anything else. But the good news is we can reverse that.

Our bodies have powerful, powerful healing mechanisms. And if we engage that, we could reverse it. So that was a very long-winded discussion on adverse childhood events, generational trauma, and mitochondria being passed on.

But all of that impacts where we are now. We see it. we see in our patients that people who are more susceptible to complex chronic illness, they've been through so much trauma in their lives very, very typically.

And yeah, a lot of the trauma can be is inflicted from the medical system itself. Our medical system is very broken in many places, and oftentimes the clients that you and I see have gone from doctor to doctor, to Dr.

to Doctor, told they're crazy, they've been dismissed, And these are all things that I had to face myself when I was sick. And yet we know, no, again, there's that cognitive dissonance.

that somebody who usually ends up in our office, it's because something inside them said, I'm not crazy. There's something wrong here that can be fixed.

Right? Yeah. So, yeah. Yeah, they've been told you're lazy or you were just depressed. You're some prozac. you are just anxious. there's nothing wrong with you.

right. Sick. They've told me you want to be sick. Well, and like, you know, depression. Depression is not caused by a deficiency of an antidepressant.

Exactly. Posis is caused not by deficiency by an anti-psychotic. Can those things help? Yes. I mean, the studies that are coming out about all the antidespressants and whether they really work or not, any better than lifestyle changes is pretty dismal.

But still, You and I know that we can address things by tackling the nutritional components, the dietary components but really so much of the psychological, spiritual, lifestyle components.

Do you do anything that brings you joy, that bring you laughter? Because that's so important when you're sick to do something little to help you every day.

Right. Honestly, while we're having this conversation, I can't help but think, wow, we are talking about difficult

topics. We're talking But I know there's a joy in you.

I mean, your smile is real. This is not a fake smile. So here we are. We're on the tracks. And, and we're still smiling and that, that I think is really, really important.

Finding Meaning, Hope, and Healing Practices

So obviously you're, you doing things that help you find your joy. Well, no, I, think that's, so important and a book that i read very early on, i think it was 18 years old that my father gave me was by Victor Frankl.

And it's a, book called Man's Search for Meaning. Victor Frankel was also, he was a Jewish psychologist who was, also in prison in the concentration camps.

He looked at, you know, the difference in people who succumbed and who just died or gave up versus those who went on to be okay, relatively okay like my dad.

I mean, he really was. My dad was a very joyful person in between his episodes of PTSD. But part of it is about what he writes about in that book is finding meaning and purpose in your suffering.

So what is, so for example, in my own situation where I had severe chronic fatigue, severe fibromyalgia, my brain quit working. I was an OB-GYN at the time. I had a huge practice.

l was taking care of a lot of, you know, ladies and patients and I have people working for me and l and then my kids were sick and i just, I couldn't keep going.

And so I just had to stop and close and change what I And that was traumatic in and of itself. But what I did is I found meaning and purpose as I learned about environmental toxicity, as learned nutritional deficiencies, and as well as genetics.

That's what got me into functional medicine. I got sick and I couldn't get better with how I was trained. And I could not get any better by going to all my wonderful, loving, compassionate colleagues.

I couldn't get better and so I started into the functional medicine realm and then I had meaning and purpose. And then my children, I have four kids, they're all adults now, but two of my four are disabled adults.

One very, very severely with severe schizophrenia, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum, that is untreated mold and Lyme among other things, among these genetics and the multiple traumas that he's suffered.

And it's been a horrendous journey, a horrible journey. And even though I have not been able to help him because by the time I learned all this stuff, he was already an adult and I could not change his, I couldn't get him to cooperate.

I tell him all the times, Michael, you have no idea how many thousands of people you've helped. Because through me and through what I've learned, I have been able to take my suffering and turn it around and give other people hope.

And so that's a piece of it. So again, but I would suggest for all those who are listening who feel like crap and who this may be resonating with is, what is the bigger meaning and purpose of your illness?

And what can you do? What new information are you learning, particularly while watching this summit? that can help not just only yourself but maybe those around you and help to shift our culture.

Thank you so much. I think this has been very, very helpful for people, for them to understand there's more than just one side to a situation of our global pandemic and this global trauma.

Understand that there is hope. And just your story, you're sharing here about the way that you experienced trauma yourself, but then that healing that you learned through yourself and through your son.

You give it out. There's so much to give and what joy that brings. So maybe we could just kind of wrap up and I can just tell some folks, you know, just what are some basic things that you can help to do to help heal yourself.

And, one of the number one things I would say is get off this as much as possible. If you are watching any television, it needs to be only things like the great bake-off or a gardening show.

Nothing violent. Just quit watching the news. This is being used and media is used to divert your attention and to divide and conquer. I mean, just look at our recent elections.

We are split right down the middle. The more we stay polarized, The more the powers that be that really have the control keep us in a state of fear and cognitive dissonance and mass psychosis.

And so stepping away from that can be one of the things that could be really helpful for you. On purpose, every day, do something, something that makes you laugh.

Okay, so what you can use this for is watching YouTube videos of babies laughing or like puppies and kittens because those are funny. That's going to make you laugh.

And there's a really funny Indian doctor who's the laugh guru. He's great to watch. I know him. Yeah, yeah. So, you know, doing things that are positive, that're joyful, they're lifting, reaching out to a friend or watching something funny, even doing something little.

If you like plants, just getting a pot and just watering a plant every day. something very similar. Nature is so important. Again, we're so bombarded being in cities and all of the energy and negativity of us, you know, sometimes that the cities are hard.

So if you can get out to the park or go for a walk or just go watch the flowers grow, that can be super helpful. Community is very helpful, so I hope out of this long haul summit that maybe some support groups start and I will be doing some health coaching in the future in this arena so people can check out my personal website for that when we're coming up.

So I think community is super important and then just having hope and, again, being connected to something that's larger than yourself, whatever word that you want to use for You know, God, Christ, Buddha, the great source, great spirit, whatever it is that you are connected to.

If you were a quantum physicist, then it's the force in Star Wars. That's what flows through us. And if we understand that we are quantum beings and we can vibrate at much higher levels of consciousness, that alone can change our health.

like that. And that's what a lot of miracle healings are, you know, Jesus and the Miracle Healings. I mean, that was changing the energy and vibration.

So you can do that and meditation, prayer, there's a really good positive thing. Those are the things that I would suggest. If you want to learn more a little bit about how our brains get influenced by mass media, I highly, highly recommend watching on YouTube AfterSchool Production.

It's S-K-O-L. After School Production is killing the mind. watch Googling that. And I think the other thing to remember is that whoever you're in disagreement with, just recognize that at least maybe 10% of what they are saying is true or right.

So have compassion for that And have deep, deep compassion for yourself in all of this. And don't beat yourself up for whatever decisions or choices that you've made.

But be open-minded, compassionate, loving to yourself first, and channeling whatever higher source God, spirit, power. I mean, that is, I know that I'm a channel for God's peace and love.

and I've been very aware of that for a long time. That's what keeps me going. So those are my little pearls of wisdom. so many pearls of wisdom and they're not so little.

They're great. Thank you. Dr. Margaret, I love the way that you bring this all together because it is about coming together. It is healing that trauma and stopping the divisiveness.

So just thank you, thank You're welcome. You have everything you do. Thank you. Stay connected, stay healthy, and join us next time on Doctor Talks, real talks from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most.