

Primary Care Cures

Episode 80: Jeanne Teshler

Ron Barshop:

This episode is brought to you by the MediSearch Institute. What happens when patients cases become too complex to solve in a typical 30-minute visit? Well, we've all had those super thick, super deep patient history nobody's looked at in a long time and gone back through. Well, I'll tell you what happened is those patients bounce around from doc to doc without getting any answers or making any progress. These patients are trapped and lost in a maze.

Ron Barshop:

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Ron Barshop:

So I promised you at the turn of the year that we would meet some people that I think can be leading the revolution of what healthcare could look like going forward. And I don't know that we have the Messiah. I don't know that there is a Messiah, but the good news about all of this is that we have a path. We know what the runway looks like, and it's going to look something like what our guest is going to be talking about today, which is living in the nest versus living in the wild. The nest would be described as anything that is in the healthcare clinic, inside the hospital, inside the system, is the 1% of the time where we're encountering healthcare face-to-face, directly.

Ron Barshop:

The rest of the time, the 99.9% of the time, we're living in our homes. We're living our lives. We're eating. We're drinking. We're sleeping. We're moving. And that is really where healthcare is going to change is when we can create a direct consumer experience, it's so easy that it's a Google or a Facebook for social, or for example, I can Uber for moving places. When we can create that kind of an experience with the consumer in the wild, we will have conquered the user experience.

Ron Barshop:

Our guest today, Jeanne Teshler, is somebody that I've actually been really deeply in the head of now for the last six months, because I'm excited about what she's working on. She's the founder and CEO of Wellsmith, which is a digital health community platform that's solving the single biggest problem facing healthcare today, a crummy consumer experience. Jeanne has pioneered

innovative solutions over the last 25 years in three disciplines. So she's at the crossroads of consumer products, technology and healthcare industries and it really took all three of those crossroads for her to be able to become a sought after speaker that addresses these complex challenges with the intersection of these three roads. So Jeanne, welcome to the show.

Jeanne Teshler:

No, thank you, Ron. It's a pleasure to be here.

Ron Barshop:

How are they? Do we have any honeybees?

Jeanne Teshler:

No, not yet. I have not gotten the honeybees set up yet. I need to clear out that part of the yard, but my next door neighbor, turns out his father was a beekeeper so I have a kindred spirit in the neighborhood.

Ron Barshop:

So the greatest GoFundMe crowdsourced system ever was this honeybee system I have where you just literally pull a crank like you're dealing with pouring a beer and you can get the honey out of the beehive without hot wax, the knives and centrifugal fuses and killing a bunch of bees. It's really an elegant system and Jeanne now is the proud owner of that because I couldn't make it happen in my neighborhood.

Jeanne Teshler:

Right. So I'm excited to get that started at some point.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. I want to hear about that consumer experience. Well, Jeanne, you're a rarity because you are a female CEO in med tech. How many people can make that title claim?

Jeanne Teshler:

In the startup world, probably a lot that we don't know about. In the tech heavy world, it's hard to find. There are few that I look at and watch and just sort of keep my eye on to see how they're handling being a female in a tech world. Med tech is a subspecialty of that technology world. You will find a lot of female executives in healthcare itself though. That is true across most of the organizations that I have encountered, is that you'll see a lot of chief nursing officers, chief medical officers, a heck of a lot more chief executive officers than I would remember back when I was a kid, for example. So there's some gains being made there, less so in technology, but that's because when you're doing a startup, your chances of dying are much higher than your chances of living.

Ron Barshop:

With a female nurturing attitude and just the DNA of a female, you would imagine in 2020, we're not having a conversation like why are more females not in CEO roles in technology? This

would be a conversation you'd expect to be having in 2002 or 1982. Why are we having this conversation in 2020?

Jeanne Teshler:

Oh, wow. That's really a hard one to unpack thoroughly. I think it's because there's a lot going on in the STEM movements to get more women into technology and that tends to be more along the programming line and women in science is also the new thing that we keep hearing about. But back when I was in college, way back in the 80s, so I'm showing my age a little bit. There, we didn't have this real push to move forward in a male or female way. My college, it was an education school for most things, there were a lot of women, more women than men because it was focused on education, just regular education, special ed, deaf ed, all of that. And so the careers that people choose tend to be sort of what they grew up in and around.

Jeanne Teshler:

I grew up with two brothers. I'm in the middle of two brothers and my experience was a lot different because my whole neighborhood was a very Catholic neighborhood so there were hundreds of children. There were mostly boys. So I hung out with guys and I had more of a relationship with how guys thought and felt than girls so I didn't grow up in the stereotypical girls do this, boys do that because I was always playing baseball with my brothers. My dad was their little league coach. And so I grew up thinking that's the way the world was. And so going into a career, I didn't think about it that way and I think that was helpful. I didn't feel glass ceilings as much as I think I would have if I was attuned to that and thinking that they were in my way. I just bust through stuff if it bothers me. And I think that's partly personal, partly how you grow up and just the entrepreneurial spirit is if you want to make something happen, you're pretty much going to have to figure it out and do it yourself. Can't wait for anybody else.

Ron Barshop:

So you weren't probably a tomboy growing up, but you're one of the guys. We all had girlfriends, I mean, female friends in high school that they could sit at the lunch table and hang with the guys and we could hang with them and they're just totally like a little sister. Was that you growing up?

Jeanne Teshler:

Yeah, but I was also the tomboy because again, my brothers were pitchers and catchers and my dad was their coach. So if they wanted to practice pitching, I was the catcher and if they wanted to practice catching, I was the pitcher. So yeah, I grew up playing all the guys sports and it wasn't until it hit me at one point and then this is again, what you hear when you're a young girl and this is before Title IX, is I wanted to play baseball with my brothers because I was as good, if not better than most of the kids on that team, I was like, "Dad, put me in." And he's like, "Well, you can't because you're a girl." Right? And so that was my first thing, is like, "Well, I can't do this because I'm a girl." And so I avoided situations in which that was a problem.

Jeanne Teshler:

I played soccer in college. I played tennis. I played all these different sports where coed was sort of the name of the game. You could play soccer if you're a girl. You can play soccer if you're a guy. You weren't on the same teams necessarily, but you could do that. So it's just an interesting

mix. I tend to not think about this as female versus male, as much as a desire to make a change and see things that need to change and understanding that I am the kind of person who's not going to sit back and wait for somebody else to solve a problem. If I know how to solve the problem, I'm going to figure out how to do it. Right? I'm going to build a team. I'm going to build a company and I'm going to take it head on, which is what we're doing at Wellsmith.

Ron Barshop:

I've had the chance to watch your youngest, Maddie, win enough races to now, she is the national name number one for the fastest, not just in the 11 and 12 and 13 year old girls, but also the boys. She is a little speed demon on a mountain bike.

Jeanne Teshler:

Yes she is. She's one of those kids. She's got all the talent and she's got a bit of drive, which is great. And again, in that arena in mountain biking, everybody rides the same course so there's no handicapping for girls versus guys. They start at different times and they race differently. And while she's 12 and the boys haven't hit that growth spurt, which is going to take her out of competition with them, she's beaten them all. She's beaten all the boys and she's beaten all the girls, including the older ones.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. And you watched a daughter, older sister, Carol, do the same thing in her mountain biking career. Elizabeth was an amazing martial artist as was your son, Rudy. And then I got to interview, Katherine, I think is getting married this weekend. Is that right?

Jeanne Teshler:

Two weekends. Yes. That's coming up.

Ron Barshop:

I think that you have raised basically four CEO daughters from what I [crosstalk 00:09:03].

Jeanne Teshler:

That's a goal. And they're all redheads. So they're going to be stubborn as heck, which is important...

Ron Barshop:

I'll say. [crosstalk 00:09:09] to your husband.

Jeanne Teshler:

...in the business world.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah.

Jeanne Teshler:

Yeah. I know. He's outnumbered. The estrogen nuclear cloud that sits over our house, it's a constant joke.

Ron Barshop:

[crosstalk 00:09:17] you've already had five kids. That's enough already. Okay?

Jeanne Teshler:

Well, we're beyond that now. Now we're going to start looking at your kids getting married and starting to have kids of their own.

Ron Barshop:

So this is a show about primary care and what's going to change primary care and you... Again, I've talked to you extensively and your theory, that's not a theory. Actually, you've proven them in that there is more going to happen in the wild than is going to happen in the nest. The nest being defined as your clinic, your OB-GYN, if that's your primary care doctor; your pediatrician, if you're a child; if you're an adult, your family doctor; internal medicine, if it's your parent. There's a lot more going on outside the wild than is ever going to happen in the nest. Is that correct?

Jeanne Teshler:

That is correct. So when you look at the amount of time that you spend in healthcare, which I think you said in your intro was about 1% of the time and that's generous. Even if you have a chronic condition, which requires you to spend a lot of time going to and from appointments every year, three, four, five, six times a year, that's still less than 1% of your time. The rest of the time you're sitting out in the wild as we call it here at Wellsmith and that's when you're just going about your everyday life. And what I discovered over time in because my husband and I, for years, we've been married for 26 years now, but we've worked together every one of those 26 years at various ventures, is we consulted and we worked in consumer goods. We've worked in technology.

Jeanne Teshler:

We've worked in healthcare and we started to see all of this movement towards value-based care in healthcare, towards wearables and sensors in technology, towards foods and fitness, things that are coming in from the consumer side to help people live better and healthier lives. And the ratio is if it's 99 to 1, the amount of time that we spend in the wild versus the nest, then the answer to our poor health problems really is in that 99% of time. And it comes down to the point of choice that we make as consumers to either do things that promote our health or that do things that detract from our health.

Jeanne Teshler:

And the problem that we see is that the things that we think are promoting our health necessarily aren't because we're not doing them enough, like getting exercise and eating well. And those things that are detrimental to our health, like sitting down and binge watching Netflix for two or three days and/or stopping at the closest fast food joint, are the things that are causing our problems. So how do we build solutions that allow consumers to continue to take better control

of their life and their health and make it seamless to them in the wild? And that's what we do at Wellsmith.

Jeanne Teshler:

The key to solving this at the consumer level, because it is consumers who are the ones who are obese. It is consumers, the ones who are having diabetes in record numbers. It is consumers with heart problems, is that the problem has to solve with them. And you won't find very many people, if any, who wake up in the morning thinking to themselves, "Boy, I really hope I feel like crap today." Right? That's not how we think, but that's how we feel when we're not well. But no one wants to feel that way and what we're missing is the opportunity. And what we're building is the answer to that opportunity of how do I get that person who wakes up in the morning and it takes them five minutes to get limber because their bones ache and they're just not well and they want to be well?

Jeanne Teshler:

And there's so much friction in that process, which is again, when you look at it and there's so many messages, like you said, I don't think it's 9,000. I think it's more like 4 or 5,000 messages that you'll get every quarter that are telling you to take it easy. You've earned a break. So grab the beer. You deserve a break today, just this once. It's part of a balanced meal. All those things that you hear over and over again, you've earned this. It's just this once, all those sugar drinks, fast foods, alcohol, binge-watching, all that is looks 5 or 6,000 messages that you'll see in a given quarter compared to the one visit you go to your doctor, and he's like, "Well, gee, Ron, your white's popping up there. I understand your knees are aching, but you know what? If you drop a few pounds, that would really help." And you leave the doctor's office going, "Dang right. I'm going to start working out."

Jeanne Teshler:

And on the way home on the radio, they're like, "Hey, there's a special at Chick-fil-A for today only." And you're like, "Well, gee, you know what? I'll get to that workout tomorrow. I'll get to that tomorrow." So what you do when you're in a relationship with a consumer in an application, which it really is because that's what all technology is to consumers are applications. When you're in that relationship with a consumer and you have their best interest at mind and you're feeding them information about what they need to do, "So Ron, it's time for you to get up and take that walk because you told me you wanted to walk 6,000 steps. So let's get started. And by the way, how you feeling at the end kind of thing, then I have your back as a helper to you, not shaming you because you didn't and not undermining you because of all this other stuff."

Jeanne Teshler:

And so when you're in that relationship with a consumer long term, then you start becoming something that they look at three, four, five or six times a day. And all of a sudden you're dismissing that 5,000 messages that they're seeing in a quarter, because you're just intermediating that because you're with them in their pocket and you're helping them.

Ron Barshop:

So Jeanne, what you're saying is the physician is not unimportant, but the physician... And we're not saying physicians shame, "Shut your pie hole and quit eating so much." We're saying that physicians have such a little touch point or such few touch points that not being an active part of a care plan, it's just that's the way that's the system's set up. But if they have a super power with a technology that's constantly reminding them of what we need to do next with our care plan, then they really are extending themselves much more than they can with a nurse practitioner, with a physician assistant or with a great MA that's calling them every day. This is actually more powerful than their own team.

Jeanne Teshler:

It is correct. And the thing with a platform, which is what Wellsmith is, is a platform and platform businesses tend to solve more than one problem, right? So we're not just solving the problem of consumers being able to more efficiently and without friction do what they need to do in order to stay healthy. Right? Which is well, if you have a condition, it's simple things like taking your medicine, it's getting some activity and it's managing your weight, it's measuring something about yourself if it's your blood pressure or your glucose so you'll understand where you are in your journey, right? An/or even just living your daily life, we know the standard is 10,000 steps a day, and that should keep you relatively well in motion and good for your joints, good for your brain, good for your heart, all of that. Right?

Jeanne Teshler:

So we solved that problem for consumers as a platform by creating simple ways that they can take control of their health and understand that it's not something that just happens to them, that they can actually direct and improve that on their own. The second problem we solve is the bigger problem that I hear from a lot of been listening to your podcast. Dr. Makary, who was the last one that I listened to talking about this idea that the physicians are burned out because no matter what they're doing as physicians, it's not helping, right? If their job is to help us to stay healthy, it ain't working, right? Because the obesity rates are climbing. The heart disease rates are climbing. The diabetes rates are climbing. That's not their job. Their job is to ensure that if we go off track, they can get us back on, but they can't help unless they know what's going on, which is the key to the platform.

Jeanne Teshler:

And why it's not just that you have this scrolling experience that's on your phone that kind of keeps you as a consumer prized of, "How am I doing and what do I need to do next?" But it's instrumented with an activity tracker, a blood pressure cuff, a glucometer if you need to measure your blood sugar, a scale, all of that is all integrated so that that information is also available on the clinical side so physicians who were tied to these consumers then have this level of intelligence they didn't have before.

Jeanne Teshler:

So if I've got a practice full of a bunch around bar shops, some who were super healthy and some who aren't, how do I know as a physician who I should be reaching out to? Well, at this point, it's a crap shoot, right? You just got to bring everybody in every three months, go through a whole bunch of analysis and then toss back the ones who are doing fine, lecture the ones who aren't, try

to get them the help that you need to give them so they can unstick themselves and then you pat them on the head and say, "I'll see you in three months."

Jeanne Teshler:

But with technology today, and this ability to gather data from the wild through sensors into an app, [that's then 00:20:00] port it over to a care side where the physicians can then intelligently go, "All right, man, I want to look at all the people this week who have fallen below 50% compliance in their medication because I know if they're not taking their meds, that's the number one indicator that they're going to get worse, it might be."

Jeanne Teshler:

And I can serve that up in real time to the docs and I can tell them who's having high glucose incidents more than usual, who's having low glucose incidents, whose blood pressure is going kind of crazy, who's got a heart rate issue. All of that information allows a physician to do his job better and actually scale because right now, the bottleneck in healthcare is getting through the front door of healthcare. There are not enough providers in the planet to solve the problem of a number of consumers who need help with their health. So we need the technology to level the playing field for the docs so they have a fighting chance to help the consumers.

Ron Barshop:

Jeanne, it appears to me, just from looking into your space a little bit in the last few months, there's a lot of sham trials going on, clinical trials. And what I mean by a sham clinical trial is if you have a hundred in a population and they're super motivated to want to lose weight, super motivated to reverse their diabetes, you've preselected a group that isn't going to be representative of the larger population. Are you seeing other folks in your space doing that or is that just my imagination?

Jeanne Teshler:

I think it is. And that's because they're still kind of stuck in that fee for service model where... And again, if you've done enough podcast about the horrors of the fee for service and how it's doing a disservice to the clinicians in particular, but you get paid on these, I guess you call them success metrics that are only attainable if you get the right populations in. So I won't bad mouth anyone who's in my space right now because there's enough work for all of us to go around. However, if you prescreen people for their desire to change, you will get a lot of people who fall out afterwards because it's harder than they think. What you need to do is move to what I really love what Dr. MacQuarrie said, was this relationship medicine model, where the doctors and the consumers are on the same page. They're not fighting each other.

Jeanne Teshler:

And we've got to be able to get the docs to be the cheerleaders for the consumers. And if you look at how technology has evolved in every other industry except for healthcare, technology has delivered empowerment to consumers in banking, in travel, in all these different areas and grocery delivery even, right? Where I can just pick up my app and I could get groceries delivered in two hours. Right? All of that empowerment is missing from healthcare and if we give consumers the right tools to manage their health, they will do a better job at doing it than anyone

else, including any companies that are out there saying, "Look, I'll coach your employees to lower weight. I'll coach them to better diabetes control. I'll coach them." No, give it to the consumers because they will do a better job if they have the tools and anyone else can do and it will be a lot cheaper and everybody will be a lot happier.

Ron Barshop:

Well, Jeanne, I want to thank you for your time. How do people find you if they're looking to connect with you?

Jeanne Teshler:

If you want to get me on my LinkedIn at Jeanne Teshler, J, E, A, N, N, E Teshler and jeanne@wellsmith.com is my email.

Ron Barshop:

Okay, great. And my favorite question to ask at the end and if you heard the MacQuarrie interview, I actually wrote his banner for him.

Jeanne Teshler:

You did.

Ron Barshop:

Because I'm such a big fan. But what would be your banner you'd fly over America to get the message out?

Jeanne Teshler:

That one is it's really directly to the consumers and it's a big one, but you have the power to do this. You have the power to change your life. You have the power to take control over your health. And it's our job at Wellsmith to give you the tools to do that. But it is in all of our control as consumers to write our own health story.

Ron Barshop:

Love it. Love that we have you on the show. Love to find more folks like you that are making the difference by looking at the consumer first as the solution, maybe not, so maybe the system isn't the solution. Maybe that hasn't worked so well for us for the last 30 or 40 years. So love the new approach and I'm betting on you guys to be a big winner in the future. So thank you again for your time. We'll do this again and catch up with you real soon. Okay.

Jeanne Teshler:

Sounds good. Thank you, Ron. I appreciate the time.

Ron Barshop:

Thanks Jeanne.

Ron Barshop:

Thanks again. Thanks again to our sponsor, the MediSearch Institute. I want to read you a note a CEO friend of mine sent me who used them for a rare childhood disease her daughter had. Dr. Talbot's research was thorough. He provided clear paths of treatment and he gave me access to the best physicians. I'm so grateful for his work. That's the MediSearch Institute.

Ron Barshop:

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