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In this episode, Taren Grom, co-founder and editor-in-chief of PharmaVOICE, meets with Kamala Maddali, Ph.D., President and Founder Health Collaborations, LLC.

Taren: Kamala, welcome to WoW podcast program.

Kamala: Thank you so much, and I thank everyone who are taking time to listen, and especially thanks to you for taking time to really bring so many wonderful voices across the industry ecosystem together.

Taren: Well, thank you for that. And you're one of those important voices across the ecosystem so I'm really eager to dig in. Kamala, you are an author, a speaker, a DE&I champion, a C-suite executive, an entrepreneur, a precision medicine expert, a rare disease patient, and an inspiring leader. How do you manage all of these personas?

Kamala: First of all, Taren, you are good at capturing and following me, all the avatars that I have actually taken and I mean it, all the avatars. Because, first of all, we are all in healthcare with many of us with our educational backgrounds, passion, learning. So education is the backbone of where we are today, how we are applying our experiences and expertise. I just want to remind everyone, there is a quote from Albert Einstein which always motivates me "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think." If you just give a little pause, isn't that really what we are doing today and what we are supposed to do today, and what we are actually learning. The more we are learning about the challenges in healthcare, the making of the human body intelligence where like we are not just learning the facts, we are actually training the mind from the failures or the lack of understandings – how else do we approach, how else do we adopt, how else do we succeed. So with that intention, there are many... I have taken literally a trend shift, a paradigm shift – do I want to be really restricted to only one role or, more than a role, responsibility?

So that's where really I've learned almost this was an eye opening, sort of awakening phase since 2013 wherein I decided I had to really understand the adoption of innovation that's happening from the pharmaceutical world and the diagnostic world, but how is it impacting at the patient level and the physician level. And also obviously on top of that, my own journey, my own personal experience, as a rare disease patient that started since 2012. That started really taking a unique dimension and approach in anything I do, not only learning the fact but also training the mind to think, and then contribute to the role that I am in and the responsibility I had taken and communicate it in a very unique way. That's where the diversity aspect comes in – how do we really bring the change that we

are supposed to see and bring the impact that we are supposed to see with all the wonderful innovation happening? Hope that is helpful, Taren.

Taren: Yes. It's incredibly inspiring to me how you can manage, as you call them, all these different avatars. We're going to dig into your rare disease patient experience a little bit later on. But in terms of your list of attributes, I noted author first only because your book "Becoming a Kamala" just launched. Tell me about the book, what motivated you to write it, and what you hope readers come away with.

Kamala: Thank you. That's so nice of you to bring up about the book, the topic, because once again it reflects who I am as a human rather than more as just as a professional with degrees and then accolades and roles and responsibilities. I think it applies to every one of us. I'm sure it'll connect to a lot of people who are really having difficulty in understanding, "Okay, what am I becoming? Where am I?". Once again, the same dilemma I go through even today and this was more evident 10 years ago, and much more evident five years ago. It's like, "Wow, I'm in the epicenter of innovation" and I'm understanding so much beyond what the textbook has taught me 22 years ago because I'm a clinician by background too, by the way; I'm a veterinarian by training. So I'm like, "Wow. So what am I learning from this and now this whole battle as a rare disease patient, what am I becoming?" Because as we all know, some might be diagnosed with a condition, some might be a caregiver with someone dealing with a condition, some might be dealing with something which you don't even have a diagnosis

Let's take, for example, all of the mental health scenarios. Despite all the accomplishments, we humans try to mull over what we don't have or what is bothering us as of today. I really wanted to break that norm. I wanted to chronicle all my experiences since my childhood. Am I Kamala Maddali that got a degree 20 years ago versus am I Kamala Maddali who was born 43 years ago – now you know my age.

So really if I can chronicle my experiences, can I understand really who am I? Once the thought that came in, and I wanted to really pencil it down and I'm like 'how am I able to battle certain things' which I started to understand, and I'm like, why am I able to battle? Why couldn't I do that few years ago but why now? I personally think when you chronicle all your experiences, meaning not just successes but failures, those are the unique learning experiences and growing experiences. Failure is first attempting learning and we all really intentionally or unintentionally we will do some unintentional mistakes or failures. But when you open the mindset of learning from a failure, then a beautiful unique version of you is blooming within you.

When I started putting various aspects of my life – my personal life; my educational sort of avatar as a student; once again personal life as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, once again as a woman – the most important aspect, as a human, and then as a rare disease patient. It really gave me that opportunity to dive into the cosmic experience and really the deep oceanic view of who am I – number one; who I will be – number two; what else

I can be. I think as humans we are all talking about mental health issues so much throughout the world, right? If you really take time and chronicle your experiences, there is the beautiful unique version of you that is learning not only from the wonderful blessed successes, but also from the failures.

I think everyone who is actually battling with these questions and there are these greater learnings and experiences you can learn from your own journey and also reading journeys like mine or anyone else who have written their experiences as memoirs or a part of their sort of journaling, they're publicly shared. I think even leveraging those sources will make huge difference and it'll really bring the change that we all want to see. Most people don't get these things handed out to them; you know it very well, Taren, and I know it very well. And I know that for a fact, because we all need to make the most of what we are given with, and cook the meal with what is given to you just like the beautiful food TV shows that you might have seen, but cook that with gratitude, with hope, and with what we desire and then the outcome is just wonderful. Don't cook it with expectations or don't pursue your goals with a certain expectation; just live in it despite the outcome then you will learn from that outcome.

I hope this journey where I actually openly talk about including my suicidal journey where I realized what I'm learning from that almost 20 years after what has happened because there's so many rebirths in my journey as a rare disease patient. Sometimes I fall, sometimes I have catatonic sort of attacks where I'm like frozen like a vegetable – I can hear everything, I can see, but I cannot talk or move. But when you really listen to someone's journey, I think it'll have a huge impact, huge benefit to a reader or to so anyone who takes time because every one of us have certain big dreams that we are aspiring for and every one of us is fighting a desperate situation, and a few of us might be just simply bored of all of their ordinary lives.

And my pure intention is if a blend of my failures, primarily, including the outcomes of successes from those learning failures can inspire me, number one, to stay what I'm becoming and then, number two, anyone in the journey who wants to prosper and then survive and be thankful with gratitude like a lotus. Kamala means lotus; a lotus grows in muddy waters, and the muddy water is equivalent to the challenges of our lives. But when we pursue our challenges or failures with an open mind and gratitude, we become that flower – that infinite resilient flower learning from the adversity. But when we wrap it up with gratitude, we build one of the best attributes of leadership which is self-empowerment which brings you onto the path to transformation in everything you pursue. That's why I named the title "Becoming a Kamala" meaning I'm really becoming a lotus, that resilient flower. And the biology of this flower is it grows in groups that's why I want to a circle of kamalas in my life.

And special thanks to you, Taren, wherein you know many of those lotuses within the healthcare industry that's why you're bringing these voices together and then letting the world be inspired or the listener be inspired to unveil their hidden sort of talent and sort

of unique experience they can bring to the world. That's what this memoir is all about, dedicating to that unique version of you and only you.

Taren: Well, I can't thank you enough for being so open and vulnerable to sharing such a personal story with us on this podcast, but as well as through your book. And you are a lotus, you are a beautiful flower, and the resilience that you have shown through your life and through your career is certainly commendable and inspiring. Taking all that you've learned from being a rare disease patient, we're going to delve in to what led to your passion for precision medicine and why this particular area of science resonates with you. And at the same time, as you said, you're managing all these different roles – you're a woman, you're a leader, you're a mother, you're a daughter – all of that on top of leading a company, writing a book, being an advocate; it's quite a lot. And so what is the secret to your success in terms of balancing all of that?

Kamala: It's like you're asking, "Okay, here is the sky, how many stars are there? Count the stars."

Taren: Right. Yeah, I get that.

Kamala: No, what I mean is there are so many ways to inspire ourselves despite even if you are in a role or not. I realized while I was even chronicling my experiences in my memoir is like we all are surrounded, including me, with people with sort of personalities historically – leaders, inspiring gurus, spiritualists, scientists in our field, and there is so much to be inspired by. So first thing is when you open up your intelligence to that perception of inspiration around you. There are so many ways to be inspired and to be driven, and being a human itself is the number one thing that I would say. We are the most supreme intelligent walking personality, right? Sort of stars walking stars, I always call it as, because that's where today's intelligence of the human body that we are unveiling what we are made of – uncountable trillions of cells. And the synergy between these cells, how we are functioning on a microsecond to microsecond, the quantum second I would say. Have really that gratitude and thankfulness for actually being born as a human; that itself infuses a lot of positivity and unparallel energy in anything that you pursue. That's why I think we all need to share those sort of journeys and stories about what you are actually and how you have become through both of your successes and failures which will actually kind of bloom more and more personalities like us.

And then learning – learning never ends, when you really shift your mindset from just interpretation to learning. It actually is constant training your every sort of role or responsibility personally and professionally that you are taking is actually building those blocks, right? Those building blocks, once again; not the blocks that are stumbling but building blocks. That's why that mindset is so important. I am sure many of us would have juggled through this "Oh my god, I'm stuck in this role." I personally think in addition to your full-time responsible role take an opportunity if you are in healthcare or if you are in tech field – anywhere. At the end of the day, every one of these are for the

prosperity of us as humans, for the good health of the humans. Take time to advocate for an organization, take time to advocate for a person; and that's where your multiple avatars are very helpful, that's why we have the most complex mindset and also the biology of the brain.

So I would say take opportunity for mentoring others in what you have excelled; that's where some of my roles are – mentoring companies, mentoring people, or mentoring organizations. Take opportunity to network. Networking is such a key aspect of human growth and professional growth and also it's an opportunity for educating others as well, depends on the role and the responsibility that you take. And then be always a mentee as well. Go and look out for other mentors wherever you want to grow personally or professionally, might be in a scientific aspect, might be in a business aspect, might be in a strategy aspect. That's where I pursued many of these roles where in its combination of learning, growing, giving, mentoring, and being mentored.

Taren: Excellent. Let's switch tax a little bit. Let's delve into your passion for precision medicine. Why this area of science for you?

Kamala: You actually are asking the most favorite question for me which is definitely precision medicine. Let me take a step back actually – what is precise medicine? So all of us know the word 'medicine' which is basically classically, we have a seen one drug. If you have a headache, you're given the drug, someone else may be given the same drug. And then shifting gears from a simple headache scenario to cancer. The word 'cancer' I think I heard in my 8th grade when I was studying my biology classes about how the cell replicates or reproduces. But now it's becoming a common word, that's scary, right? It's becoming common wherein a neighbor or a friend... in my case, a 43-year-old, the most beautiful aunt, youngest aunt of mine, in less than nine months died with lung cancer; and a 7-year-old a distant nephew who I knew him just three years ago and two years ago he passed away. He passed away with brain cancer, ependymoma. And then through my advocacy activities. Pretty much I wake up, I think every day someone's battling with cancer or who have given up their life due to cancer.

So the cancer field especially is where precision medicine has given a lot of hope, meaning precise medicine, because what we have learned in this past 15 years especially, and 10 years much more aggressively and deeply explored our genetic makeup, the DNA, which is the soul of our body, the DNA, is what the genes is what's defining your responses to a disease or even your responses, your day-to day activities, what you do, what you think, what you drink; I really mean it, data is coming. How you react, your lifestyles – everything is contributing to genetic changes. And these diseases just don't come overnight and they build up so they attack your immune system. So we are learning that in cancer more than 15-20 pathways are compromised or challenged and scientists have really unveiled those hallmarks of cancer and they're designing new novel medications or targeting those pathways or genes that are actually activating those pathways.

So technically if I walk in and got diagnosed with cancer, first thing is I would go through genetic testing or DNA testing and in some cases RNA testing as well. And then they would actually match me with a trial or a treatment which is targeting that particular type of genetic pathway. So that's where precision medicine is wherein it is the right drug for the right patient based on your right makeup, meaning right testing which is in the context of genes that will be right to genetic testing or if it's the protein, like for example in the context of Keytruda. One of the most sort of widely adopted drugs is Keytruda wherein they also came up with not only genetic biomarkers but protein-based or circulating biomarkers we call it as, some of them in the form of protein. So you really need to go through that particular aspect of testing the patient which would define access to the treatment and trial.

But not only we made a lot of advancements in this past seven years especially tremendous number of drugs, tremendous innovations happened, but the impact is not seen at the rate which it needs to be seen, Taren. One of the biggest challenges is community, right? Patients go to community; you and I want to go to a community doctor first not to John Hopkins or Mayo Clinic which is three hours or four hours away, right? Innovation in the form of testing trials and treatments should go to the patient and to the doctor. They cannot just keep on running towards this innovation because there is so much coming.

So I think that's where the role of artificial intelligence comes in strongly in augmenting our intelligence with what we have invented thus far and accessing the intelligence and accelerating our intelligence access in the context of precision medicine so the doctor has all the tools in that one-on-one conversation as they are treating the patient and when the patient comes back with more resistant cancer or for example more resistant disease or recurring disease. So that's where really precision medicine has a huge role play, but we are also learning a lot from the facts as we are adopting and that's where AI is coming into play from development of novel drugs, better drugs based on the unique biology of the patients, to adoption of these precision medicine innovations.

Taren: That's heady stuff there, my friend. Wow. And it all links back to your initial statement about Einstein that it's not just about learning the facts, but it's training your brain to think differently and to think about different ways of working, of thinking, etc. You are certainly very much a role model for so many. What does this mentor of responsibility mean to you? You talked earlier about being a mentor to others. What is your philosophy on being a role model?

Kamala: Thank you for that question. It means a lot and I'll apply it into the context of medicine actually. I wanted to be an MD, but then I saw my family pursue an entrepreneurial path, none of them were pharmacists but a couple of them including my father was a chemist. I didn't know the term 'STEM' or 'STEAM' that we call today, that we want our kids, our nieces, nephews, all of them want to pursue, but are we talking

about STEM in real life and also in our professional roles? It is actually the STEM approach we are taking. So one of the learnings that I realized midway through my career was that's when I learned the STEM concepts in United States and I'm like, "Oh my god, everything is a collaboration." Everything is a collaboration which unveils the higher sources and the higher adoptive capabilities of innovation. It can be your mindset, it can be the inventions and the discoveries that we humans are doing.

So that's where I think really the mantle passed and it's also a responsibility that we have to have collaborative approaches as families, as communities, as companies, even in the context of investment portfolios. Let's take the example of COVID – how many of us have really put a collaborative angle, unveil the collaborative angle "Oh my god, we can cross-apply this drug into the COVID battling with this sort of a side effect or this sort of a sign or even addressing COVID also directly.

And then the same thing happened in the testing industry. Every company that actually had an instrument for genetic testing or antibody testing actually shifted their portfolio and collaborated strongly to address their testing needs, the screening needs and the diagnostic needs. And when you take that from a personality perspective especially in healthcare, my request to anyone that is pursuing that might be midway or that might be even in an executive level or a board level – at every level including a student level, is the art of medicine, especially the art of healthcare, consists of three elements; Hippocrates' greatest quote this one is – the disease, the patient, and the doctor. We really need to approach it from that way.

Taren: Interesting. So from the disease, from the patient, from the physician and that's how we should be looking at medicine?

Kamala: Yes.

Taren: Okay. That's awesome.

Kamala: And that's where your avatars are very much... meaning the roles and responsibilities, don't restrict your potential to only, "Oh, I can only contribute to my full-time role." Take time – take time and advise another company which is not a competitor but which can be a collaborator. Take time and advise a nonprofit organization focused on patient component. Take time and call your doctor friend who is not up to speed with the innovation because there's changes coming. We will be seeing doctor scientists, doctor engineers, doctor chemists –all combinations will be coming in the roles that we'll be taking.

Taren: Interesting view to the future. Thank you for sharing that. You touched on some of this a little bit earlier in terms of some of the things that women might need to do or the things that you've done to get ahead and reach that executive level. In addition to

networking and being collaborative, what are some of the other things that women who may want to reach that C-suite should be they be doing to achieve that goal?

Kamala: That’s a very good question. Many women including with my most recent role where I was actually the vice chair for Women In Bio, Philadelphia, where I noticed “Oh my god, Philadelphia doesn’t have a chapter for Women In Bio” which is still focused on life sciences aspects. Build your circles. If there is something that you want to contribute, speak about it, communicate. That is the first attribute of empowerment, right? You’re advocating for an observation or a change that you really want to bring. Even if you are alone, don’t hesitate; speak about it and build your circle.

So that’s where the attribute of empowerment is so powerful there and reach out to other women, reach out to organizations. It may not be always a super big mega organization because you need to interact with people. There are not enough organizations, trust me, who really want to bring the change and you really need to be a part of an organization if you want to start with a small change. And then go into part of a big organization where you can resonate your vision and your perceptions will resonate ultimately with that sort of an organization. First thing is empowerment, starting with self-empowerment. Don’t hesitate to talk about your sort of perception or sort of observation, so you need to communicate and then you need to collaborate. So build your circles. Personal advisory boards is something I would highly recommend. I recently came across this term so I’m not trying to take the credit; I will give the credit to whoever came up with that in the industry, but build your own advisory boards. That’s why it’s important, right? Build your circles.

And then build your mentors and also build your mentee circle and mentor circle. These are very important, diverse, unique aspects. The backbone for this, Taren, as you know well is networking. Talk to people. When you talk to people, you will find some sort of alignment in some aspects so build those buckets. Who do I go after when I need something like this? So even within those mentor and mentee circles, come up with those specialty sort of traits or attributes. And in my experience, it’s a never-ending experience. It’s a good thing because it’s also good change because as you are learning the facts, as I said, you’re actually training the mind to think, “Oh, good. Now I have built this pillar of success of perseverance. I need to build this pillar of passion more.” I want to learn more than go and seek mentorship from someone in the industry or someone say in the academia who could really connect with you and talk to you and give back – give back. That’s very important aspect because that’s the law of attraction, right?

Taren: Agreed.

Kamala: Yeah. So that’s when you actually raise the next generation leaders and thinkers and doers. So that selfless intention is very important as well.

Taren: I love that selfless intention. Yes, it is about giving back. It can't be a two-way street when you're going to build those circles. You have to give as much as you get, for sure. And finally, because this is our WoW podcast program, I'm going to ask you to identify an accomplishment or a WoW moment that either shaped your career or changed the trajectory of your career and I'm going to hold to one, if you can.

Kamala: Okay, that's tough, Taren. So you might have to put me into a second podcast next time, okay? Since it's WoW, focused on women sort of empowerment aspects, I will actually take a moment especially after I launched Women In Bio Philadelphia chapter with my chair, I take up her name as a moment of gratitude because that's one thing; we, as women, we need to advocate for other women who have really brought us that opportunity to bring that empowering moments in our life, that WoW moment. So as a nonprofit, Women In Bio was invited for ringing the closing bell ceremonial of New York stock exchange.

Taren: How exciting.

Kamala: Fabulous moment. Really lively moment wherein we were there in the world of profit companies, right? Many out there. And then we went out there and we had that moment of giving back and being recognized for our selfless intentions, because one of the main goals of Women In Bio is raise more boardroom-ready leaders, raise more C-suit leaders, more senior leaders. At every level, they had wonderful leadership programs and Women In Bio was very well recognized for those efforts of boardroom-ready programs.

So that was really an amazing moment wherein woman stands for, that's when I realized, wonderful man. Man is actually unisex term as for the medical dictionary. It's not just a masculine side. So it's that wonderful human in us was that moment that unveiled when we all were invited for the closing bell ceremony of New York stock exchange, actually. So we really have those traits in us as wonderful woman to really raise wonderful humans despite of being a man or woman, and build those walls of collaboration between both sides of humanity to address the greater battles in humans' sort of day-to-day traumatic experiences with health.

Taren: Wow. That is an amazing wow, and congratulations. And I have to tell you, I think you are a fabulous human, so thank you for bringing your full kamala to this podcast and for sharing so many wonderful insights and being so open and transparent because it's not easy to talk about some of the things you discussed. I so appreciate your bringing your story to our WoW podcast program. Thank you so much.

Kamala: You're welcome, Taren. And let us become the change we all want to see by building the right circles. Thank you.



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