

August 11, 2021

Welcome to WoW – the Woman of the Week podcast from PharmaVOICE. This episode was made possible by a generous sponsorship from NXLevel. For more information, visit nxlevelsolutions.com.

In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Laura Randa, Chief Commercial Officer, Curio Digital Therapeutics.

Taren: Laura, welcome to our WoW podcast program.

Laura: Taren, thank you so much for having me. I'm delighted to be part of your WoW podcast.

Taren: I'm so excited to speak to you again. It's been a little bit since you won your – you were recognized as PharmaVOICE 100, and since that time I know that your journey has taken a few twists and turns over the last 18 months. Talk to me about this journey that you are on of reimagining and reinvention.

Laura: Yeah. It's a great question. I've been very unique and blessed in my career that I've had these three different unique phases of my career that's really brought me to today. My first 10 years, I had the great opportunity to serve under a Republican governor in the state of Delaware and President Biden was the chairman of my board. But as you remember President Bush actually had the point of life. And one of the initiatives was is to bring community service into K-12 education. There were amazing mentors and sponsors that helped me from early days of my career, and it was an amazing ecosystem of 49 other state leaders trailblazing this new area really bringing how do kids learn about wetlands, but then go out and do a service project.

It was phenomenal experience early, early days and I was able to get involved in federal and state legislation, building public/private partnerships, making an impact in healthcare and really again very, very thankful for early stage mentors and sponsors.

I then had the opportunity to pivot and I pivoted into healthcare. I've had the opportunity of working at companies like Abbott, GSK and Novartis, but I've also had the opportunity of working with small companies like Avanir, a small private equity firm building their first fully integrated pharmaceutical company. And a little New York eye company that I started as the 100th commercial person and when I left 7,000 people, and that certainly is Regeneron.

I was very fortunate throughout the whole career to have an opportunity to build really unique opportunities. I was able to launch Dupixent at a very, very different model. I'm just so excited after yesterday and looking at the Regeneron earnings, the first quarter Dupixent actual sales actually exceeded Eylea, one of their blockbuster drugs. So I have just had the great opportunity to be part of early days shaping new markets, bringing innovation to a very unmet need market, and that was atopic dermatitis for Dupixent.

So during COVID as I mentioned previously, I was at a company that actually was going to be a fully integrated pharmaceutical, and so I actually in October during COVID, I actually took a pause and decided to take and move myself into phase 3 of my career. One of the things that I really did was stop, pause and said to myself what do I like, who do I like to be working with, what kind of technology do I like to be working with, and I hired an executive coach to work with me. And it's so interesting now that we're watching the Olympics. The Olympics have coaches every single one of them and they work with them everyday. It's so important that we as we're working in a workplace every single day to also have coaches and support and sponsorship.

So I hired this coach who basically said to me let's figure out what kind of company, what kind of size, what do you want to be working on. And it was interesting because a mentor of mine said, okay, you're going to leave a company on Friday. You don't have to have a job on Monday. Take the time and really think about what is it that you want to be able to do, what is it that you want to contribute in, what kind of team do you want to be a part of.

So I embarked in a journey that was very interesting to me. I was so fortunate because it was COVID and everybody wasn't on planes and everybody wasn't in a car for two hours, and I was able to tap into people and every single day I was so fortunate that I spoke to 6 to 8 new people and built my network to actually focus on the goal that I had set out for. And those people were board members and investors and CEOs. I was so ecstatic that they spent some time with me, learning about their journeys and really saying wow, here are the pieces that I'd like to bring in for my next journey. Along the way, I helped a lot of people, but a lot of people helped me.

And so today, I'm in week three of my new role as Chief Commercial Officer at Curio Digital Therapeutics, and it's a company focused on women's mental health. I'm just so thrilled to be part of this new trailblazing area really focused on, I believe, especially coming out of COVID {*fingers crossed*} is going to be one of the next real struggles that we face around mental health and I'm just so excited to be part of it.

Taren: That is awesome. I can't believe the amount of time, effort and careful effort that you put into this next phase, and I think that as women we don't usually do that. We don't take the time to pause and try to figure out what that next piece is. So kudos to you and kudos to your industry recognition and record because people picked up the phone for you and that's also tremendously impressive. Curious, what were some of the questions you asked these folks? I mean I'll call them your informal advisers, if you will, what kind of things did you ask that helped you frame out that next piece for yourself?

Laura: When we were growing up, one of the shows that I always watched was *Columbo*. "One more question." And I think that was always that curiosity. It was really around tell me about your journey. This is where I was thinking I want to go. These are the things that I like to do. Tell me about jobs and opportunities and workplaces that you actually did that and if I'm here and I'm going to there, what advice would you give me and who else should I talk to. And it was amazing just those insights really listening to people about what was really critically important. I very clearly said I wanted to be in the C-suite.

I think one of the things somebody said to me, which is absolutely true, is you need to manage P&L. Everything that as you're talking P&Ls you need to highlight all those works of really whether it's – recently I had an opportunity to join American Association of People with Disabilities board. Work on the finance committees to really get yourself involved with senior leaders, get them engaged, be very, very focal about your finance.

So I think what I learned was really the pause of people's journeys, how they networked, how they networked all the time successful people. They were always bullet proofing – what I'm going to call bullet proofing their career. Sometimes I think we're always just too insular. We work on who are the people in our companies, who are the people in our professions, like for me market access, but you didn't go broader. You didn't go into the commercial organization or people maybe that were doing business development. I think as you want to round out as a leader I think it's really critical to really ask those questions about what experience is it important for me to have. How did you get it? What was important? How was it important to communicate that? Was it important to do it internal? Where should I show up externally? It was just amazing how many ideas that led to things of everything – helping me with the companies, doing more presentations, having more social media impact, influence and acknowledgement. It was just an interesting, interesting insight. But I couldn't be more grateful because the time that people gave me, it was probably one of those periods in my life the nine months of where and how I grew the most.

Taren: That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that because I think that's so important especially as we see how many women are transitioning in and out of jobs due to COVID and that there is really, that's a great roadmap to perhaps take for somebody's next step, right. Take the time to pause, ask the right questions, tap into your network, build your network even further than it is and imagine what's possible. So congratulations. I want to dig in to the work you're doing at Curio Digital. You talked about it being a woman's mental health company, and I understand you're working on an app, is that correct?

Laura: Yeah. So what we know today is that this is just an amazing statistic. There's 200 million work days, 200 million work days per year are lost because of behavioral health conditions.

Taren: Wow.

Laura: And it costs employers up to \$44 billion annually. We also know that a Kaiser Foundation report came out that post-COVID we're even seeing numbers of plus 10%. So I am thrilled that we are actually going to be launching a platform to address women's mental health issues through their cycle of life. We will launch in the fourth quarter with postpartum depression. We will also follow on with contraception, infertility and menopause. What we know is that postpartum depression is one of the most debilitating behavioral conditions of any kind. Think about if mom goes down, everyone goes down in that house.

I'm so thrilled to take on this newly created chief commercial role at this new emerging company so that we're going to link not only our ability to have predictive analytics, so we can

actually go into databases and predict which women will have postpartum depression by risk factors coupled with AI. We'll be able to link to workplace integrations and then we'll have cognitive behavioral models to treat PPD. It's going to be so critical because we know that there's a behavioral health therapist shortage. We might be okay in metro areas, but in the rural areas or suburban areas we're going to tough shortages. And then moms we all know that there is well visits for babies, but there's not the mom well visit. How do we deliver these important things so that moms, their spouses, their partners and the families enjoy that new baby, and if they have any struggles that they actually are dealing with it.

I had no idea before I was involved in this, that there's six million pregnancies, four million births in the United States, 13% before COVID had postpartum depression and now we're creeping into 20, 25% and in partners 10%. So we definitely have something that is a high unmet need, and I'm so excited to be part of bringing a solution to this really important need for families.

Taren: That's amazing. I usually save this question for the end, but would you consider this to be one of the wow moments of your career?

Laura: There's so many wow moments in my career that I've been able to launching Quadrivalent flu back in 2010, 2011, 2012. It was really an unmet need that we had to bring to society.

But I have to tell you, with women and families and the struggle that we're facing, being able to come in and one of the most important happy moments of their lives bringing a new baby into the family but really making sure that mom is healthy, making sure the spouse is healthy and that the neonate or the baby and society are really happy to be functioning as a happy family unit is absolutely one of my big wows. I think it's way up there on the top of the list.

Taren: That's fantastic and congratulations again. We're starting to hear more news come out, you talked about the partner piece of this and yes, postpartum depression has been certainly something that has been recognized for many years for women, but now is starting to be recognized for men as well. I am wondering if that won't help jumpstart this because once you get the men involved then all of a sudden it's real problem, right. I don't want to be cynical, but you know what I'm saying.

Laura: Yeah, absolutely. And it's stunning; 10%, 1 out of 10 dads are suffer from postpartum depression.

Taren: It's a big number.

Laura: It's a big, big number and I see that you're spot on, Taren. Like I think this is one of those silent diseases that people didn't talk about.

Taren: Agreed.

Laura: And I think we are starting now. We saw Brooke Shields incident of dealing with postpartum depression and various other social media folks that have really been out forwardly talking about postpartum depression and the impact to them. Chicago just released very, very large study for the partners and the spouses.

So I think that finally for the first time is coming out of the closet because – and now we just have to find solutions. But remember what we have currently today is we either have IV, nasal or it's older SSRIs. They all are going to go in the breast milk. As a woman, we're having a challenge right now with vaccines or other things – people certainly don't want medicine in their bodies when they're potentially going to be breastfeeding. So it's going to be really, really critical to really come up with some alternative options to be able to really have an effective outcome for the moms.

Taren: Absolutely. So I'm looking forward to seeing what happens throughout the rest of this year with you all and then going into next year. It will be interesting to reconnect and see how the needle is moving. I look forward to that conversation. A few minutes ago you referenced your work with the American Association of People with Disabilities. You sit on the board of directors. Tell me about this role and why it's so important to you?

Laura: I couldn't be more thrilled with this, when Ted Kennedy Jr. came to me and asked me to consider being part of AAPD board. Disability has impacted my family, and I've always become an advocate for this because I've been very personally passionate about it. My first engagement was is something that was really near and dear to my heart is the first I was the founding member of the Disability Workplace Roundtable Group, which currently to date which was launched in April at our recent gala, and it allows companies to come together to help with advocacy with policy both at federal and state legislation and share best practices among companies about how do you hire, how do you train, how do you onboard, how do you make sure that we're not just having gender inclusion; we're also looking at disability inclusion in our workplace. Because there was an Accenture report recently done a couple of years ago that says the more you could be exclusive, especially in the disability community, you're going to have so much better outcomes.

So it's really critical. So that's how I started involvement with the AAPD and then it expanded into being on the board of directors. Community service has always been important to me and my family for so many reasons. I encourage a lot of people that I mentor, younger women, that I think serving and cross-functionally serving in a community service function teaches that so much compassion and understanding. And there's so many opportunities to improve and grow as a leader in these kind of cross-functional opportunities. It's also a way to leave your mark on a global or a local community.

I'm excited about being part of this, this as a board member. Definitely, the disability workplace inclusion is definitely something that I'm very, very focused on, continuing to grow those 45 companies that we've launched with to many companies. Hopefully we can really make an impact into our workplace. We've all seen signs everywhere we go that we're hiring; here's a whole new community, whether it's people that are in wheelchairs, whether it's autistic.

President Biden just put the executive order under the disability community. Pre-COVID it was 60 million people, one out of four Americans in the United States have a disability. I'm just so passionate that we also need to be including them in the workplace and giving them the support that they need.

Taren: You couldn't have said it better. That was awesome. Thank you so much for all the work you're doing there on behalf of so many millions of Americans. Because you're not busy enough, you're also the co-chair of the Executive Women in Bio in the Capital Region. So tell me about what this role entails for you and what you're doing for this organization.

Laura: I am a true believer that – and I think it was relearned for many of us during COVID of how powerful our support networks are. Don't wait until you need your networks to build and reconnect with your networks. How do we support each other all the time to be able to make a stronger ecosystem for everyone. And again, I go back to I've had amazing mentors and support all over my life, and one of the things that I've been really committed to doing with Executive Women in Bio is how do we help these younger generation women to secure leadership roles and ultimately get them to their leadership roles, whether that's the C-suite or whatever else they may be interested, board members or whatever.

But I think we have to help the future just like so many people helped me. So that's my commitment. I served with two wonderful women. We actually share co-chair, and it's been extremely fun getting this up and going in the Capital Region and it's proven to be such a valuable asset for so many people. We hear that over and over again. It's so exciting now to take the time to really develop us and not just do our work, but give some time to us and enrich us and build friendships and make those connections because I think we learn every single day from so many different people.

Taren: Awesome. And your board roles don't end there, because you also sit on the board of – am I pronouncing this correctly – Tutela Pharmaceuticals and Springboard Enterprises. I know Springboard is of particular interest because of its mission and that's all about the women too, yes?

Laura: Yeah, absolutely. You'll probably hear from my earlier comments is I've been very mission driven all throughout my career. I was very fortunate that Amy Millman who 20 years ago had started building Springboard had this vision of bringing a forum together to bring women together as emerging companies and be able to support them going from – there was a big regulatory approval focus, but how do you go from a regulatory approval to planning for commercial success. So I've been real involved with emerging companies in both the women's health space, as well as the digital therapeutic companies. And it's been very rewarding to see how those companies have grown. A couple have even gone IPO, which was super exciting, but also just seeing how they've brought the products to market or even sold their specific companies or assets.

So it's been very, very rewarding. I think that's one of the things that I would tell people that really made a difference in my career, was drive yourself from just your daily, your normal kind

of payday job and really kind of expand because you see different viewpoints, you meet other people and just your whole world kind of grows bigger.

Taren: Absolutely. You've offered a couple of really key pieces of advice, open up your network, build that network before you need it, step outside of your comfort zone a bit, think about P&L responsibilities if you want to get to that C-suite. What other advice that you can offer to women who aspire to the C-suite and are trying to map out that journey for themselves.

Laura: I think probably the other last pearl that I think, again, I think very much we talked about this was don't just talk about how great a new product is; talk about how it's going to increase sales calls, talk about how it's going to drive revenue growth. Talk about how it's going to improve market share, how it's going to impact the business. It's really, really important because I think when I talk to CEOs or board members in my journey over the last nine months it was surprising to me how many of them said we can't find the right leaders. We don't have the right people with X, Y, Z experience. And so that's why I just really think that not only do you need to get the P&L management experience, but you've got to create and be able to talk about the impact of it, what I just kind of highlighted.

I think the other thing that's really important as emerging executive and especially as you're escalating levels in the organization is anytime you come into a company, the first thing you're going to do is create a vision for success. What does it look like for me as my new role as CCO, but what does it also look like for the organization. How am I going to execute it and execute it flawless? Beat the goal. Be successful and continue to spend the time with your team. It's so important. Because I think, I don't look at myself as a business leader; I look at myself as an overall business leader, not just as a chief commercial officer.

So it's really important to be able to say what's the best thing for the business. So I think that's really important, like you certainly have to own the part of the business that you also are certainly responsible and accountable for, but also as you get higher up in the leadership, you also have to make sure that the overall business is running and the teams and the people are all working together.

Taren: Absolutely, and that is a great way to end our chat today. Your insights are so valuable, and I can't thank you enough for being a part of our WoW podcast program. I hear the passion in your voice. I am inspired by you. I can't wait to see what happens with this new company you're with. As I said, we'll be tracking it over the coming months and into the coming years. I want to wish you continued success, and thank you for all that you do for so many others.

Laura: Taren, thank you so much for having me. It's always a pleasure of mine having the opportunity to sit down and talk with you. Thank you again.

Thank you for listening to this episode of WoW – the Woman of the Week podcast. And thanks to NXLevel for making this episode possible. For more information, visit nxlevelsolutions.com. And don't forget to check out our other WoW episodes at pharmavoices.com/wow.