

115: Taking Care of Your Brain



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Welcome to *The Wealthy Mom MD Podcast*, a podcast for women physicians who want to learn how to live a wealthy life. In this podcast you will learn how to make money work for you, how you can have more of it, and learn the tools to empower you to live a life on purpose. Get ready to up-level your money and your life. I'm your host, Dr. Bonnie Koo.

So right now, I am actually in New York City, I live just outside of it in New Jersey. And I am staying at a hotel downtown because tomorrow I will be spending two days with my business coach. And I needed to record a podcast and so I brought my mic to the hotel.

So fair warning, New York City, as many of you know, can be quite noisy and my room is on a busy street. And so there have been sirens going on all day and honking et cetera. So you might hear some.

So I just got back from Nashville, Tennessee, I was there as the keynote speaker for the Women in Pain Medicine conference. I didn't go to the actual conference since I don't practice pain medicine, obviously. But what was amazing about it was the women there were so amazing.

So obviously, women in pain medicine and I'm sort of guessing mostly, but the whole reason behind having a conference, a gathering for women only is to promote women, to empower them. And as you know, in medicine women are still way outnumbered.

So this is kind of an aside, but I went to some of the meals and they were sponsored by, not pharmaceutical companies but medical device companies. And they were talking about, well they were just showing what I thought were like wild things. Just, you know, as a dermatologist, obviously, we deal with skin.

And so I learned that pain medicine doctors do a lot of procedures and they're doing some weird stuff in the spine. So that kind of makes sense, they're treating pain and so a lot of the pain originates from the nerves, the spinal cord. And so I just found the whole thing fascinating.

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Back to my keynote talk, as you can imagine I did talk about money, obviously, since I like to talk about that. And if you were there, thank you for listening. And I talked about really, the only thing you really need to know is that you need to buy and grow assets and to understand what an asset is.

And honestly, the hardest part of that is not actually the learning of the doing because I'm telling you, these doctors can understand what the heck these devices do and all the physiology and all that stuff, which honestly, I never quite understood during medical school. It is not a complexity problem.

It is not a I can't learn this problem because money itself, investing, real estate, whatever is actually not that hard compared to what you learned in medical school or whatever school you went to. Seriously. What gets in the way is you, your brain. That's actually what I said, this is what gets in the way of getting rich, you. And I went into some more detail.

And so it was great. I haven't given a talk in a while and I actually don't love speaking. I feel like I talked about this maybe a podcast or two ago, but yeah, I get really nervous and I get really stressed out before. This time it wasn't so bad. Like once I was there I didn't feel nervous, and I usually do so I guess that's an improvement.

But I'm pretty picky about taking on speaking gigs because A, I get nervous and stressed out. And it's a lot of traveling. I love traveling, but lately I've been feeling a little tired. And yes, I'm in New York right now. I could have commuted daily, I thought about it but it's a lot of traffic from New Jersey to New York so I just booked a hotel. And I'm going to Denver next week. And so it's just been a bit much.

Anyway, that's not what I actually want to talk about today. Before we start on today's topic, are you coming to Hawaii? October 10th through the 13th I'm having an amazing retreat. It's going to blow your socks off. Like if you knew what I was planning and all the surprises that we have planned for you, you'd want to come. And it is filling up and I definitely want you there.

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And so if you've been dreaming about it, then I want to invite you to chat with me. And so we will put the link in the show notes, or actually probably the easiest thing is to just go to my website, wealthymommd.com/retreat, and if you scroll down you'll see a link to schedule a call with me. So we will have about 30 minutes and I will help you make a decision.

I have spoken to a few of you and you have found it really helpful in terms of making a decision and asking any questions you might have. So wealthymommd.com/retreat, and you can schedule that call.

Okay, so here's what I want to talk about today. Not too long ago I sent an email and posted on my social media about how I am on psychiatric medication. And I talked about it very openly and I got such amazing responses and so I knew I had to do a podcast on it. I wanted to talk about my experience, and honestly, I guess, make it more okay to talk about it, because we don't. Kind of like how we don't talk about money.

Now, talking about our mental health, as you know, is very stigmatized, maybe even more so than talking about money. Especially for physicians, because when you apply for medical licenses or credentialing, they actually ask you about whether you're under the care of psychiatrists.

Actually I don't know if they ask you if you're on medication? Probably not because I don't think that's a legal question. But they ask about your mental history and you have to say yes or no. And most people I know just lie because they're worried about repercussions.

So first of all, that's totally effed up because it is. Mainly because first of all, the whole divide between mental health and physical health is just dumb. It is all health. The brain is an organ, it is. But it's been stigmatized and it's almost like we feel like we can't do anything about it or get help or support, which is just craziness.

I'm going to talk more about that a little bit. So before I talk about sort of where I'm at right now and sort of recent things that led me to even talking

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about this, I feel like I need to backtrack a little bit and give you a little bit of history.

So I have a son, as many of you know, he is turning five in October. And so I took about four months of maternity leave and then I started a new job. All that to say that I had some big life stressors happening all in a very short amount of time.

Now, I didn't have postpartum depression. I definitely had postpartum anxiety, which I didn't even know was a thing, but it is. Mainly because I think so many of us hear about postpartum depression and so we don't usually hear much about postpartum anxiety.

And here's what I found interesting, I don't really consider myself a super anxious person, and maybe I'm incorrect. But I do remember how I felt after having Jack. And it wasn't so much about worrying things overtly, I have to actually think about it for a second because it's been a while.

But I just remember feeling overwhelmed and that I couldn't keep track of things, I couldn't plan things, like everything just felt kind of crazy in my brain. I didn't feel sad, but it just felt like too much. I didn't have a panic attack, but I do remember having this feeling of like things almost spinning.

Not like the room spinning, but things spinning because of just all the stuff in my brain and I couldn't make sense out of it. And I actually did go on Zoloft for a little while, my OB/GYN suggested it. And in case you don't know, Zoloft is a pretty commonly prescribed medication for postpartum depression.

I definitely think it helped. And then I was able to go off of it. And I would say for a good part of 2021, if I had to give a timeframe probably mainly the second half of the year. Maybe starting in September, I really couldn't tell you, I was not doing great. And here's what I mean by that, I struggled a lot last year personally and in my business.

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And what I mean by that is, for a large part of the year I felt like it was a struggle in my business in terms of making money and also in terms of how I was feeling about me in the business. Meaning I started to really believe that maybe something was wrong with me and that I had sort of lost my ability to make money.

I know that might sound strange, like even me just saying this out loud sounds strange. But that's really how I felt, I really felt like something was wrong with me. And as you can imagine, when you keep thinking something is wrong with you, nothing good happens.

And then I started to feel hopeless. And I think what's dangerous is that I don't even think I really was able to see that I was really not in a good place. And two of my friends, and they're both coaches, and one of them is a physician, actually told me maybe it was through text, I don't remember, that they were worried about me.

And that honestly prompted me to do something about it almost immediately. And I'm so grateful that I did something about it and I made an appointment with a psychiatrist right away. And I'll be honest, I feel very privileged as a physician that I could find a psychiatrist pretty quickly.

Meaning like get a name and actually get an appointment very quickly, because I do know how hard it is to find a psychiatrist or even a therapist, and many of them don't take insurance. And I feel very grateful, and again, privileged that I'm in a position to pay cash.

And yeah, it is not cheap. And it's the best things I've ever done for myself in terms of paying to help my brain. Because if your brain doesn't work, if your brain isn't well, it doesn't really matter what else is going on, right?

And the first appointment was well over an hour, I don't remember, but it was a long interview. And there was a follow up. And after she kind of got all the information she did and it was time for her to tell me what she thought, I mean, it was very simple, she said you are depressed. And I just

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remember even just her saying that it just, it really felt like a huge weight was off my shoulders.

It just felt like relief because I think I really was trying to just like figure it out on my own and kind of just like white knuckling through things. Because I think as physicians and, you know, any super type A, high achieving, like we think we can just figure it out, we don't need help.

And I just want to say how dangerous that is. I know logically we kind of know that's not useful, but we all do it. And I think as physicians, we're more prone to it because our training really emphasizes that you got to suck it up, literally, and deal with it.

And so I started medication and I started a medication called Lamictal, I had talked about that in my email. And, obviously, I'm not a psychiatrist, but it is different than most other antidepressant medications. In fact, I don't even think it's FDA approved for depression. It's FDA approved for, I think, bipolar. I'm not bipolar as far as I know.

But it works specifically for the depressed mood part, not for the mania part. And it doesn't have a lot of the side effects that SSRIs can have. And so she suggested that, and I'm at a stable dose and I feel great.

And what I mean by feeling great is my brain is back to the way it should be, it is working. And it is so nice to have my brain back and I was going to say like I just feel like I'm at home again. And now that I'm "back to normal" it's really easy for me to see that where I was at the end of last year, it's like night and day is the best way I want to talk about it.

Now, I just realized something I forgot to say about four and a half years ago when I had Jack and I had the postpartum anxiety. I had two postpartum hemorrhages, right, as if one isn't enough. And in case you're not quite sure what that means, I almost bled to death twice.

Now, the good news is I gave birth in a hospital so there were people there right away. And one of my good friends actually delivered Jack and I was at

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the hospital that I was an attending, I was on faculty for my first job out of residency. And, you know, he popped out and Jessica is the one who delivered me, so if you're listening, hi.

I've got say OB/GYNs are some calm women because, I don't know, if there was like a crazy complication going on I'm not sure I'd be calm. But I just remember her saying, "Huh, that's a lot of blood." And when she said that, because she said it so coolly I didn't think much of it because I know there's bleeding after having a baby like it's normal. Like I think I read somewhere that losing up to half a liter is "normal." That's still a lot of blood though, maybe it's 250, don't quote me on that.

And the next thing I remember is my room was filled with doctors. And after the fact, I was told that yes, it was the OB crash team, not a good thing you want to show up to your room. Obviously, I'm fine because I'm here. But I got basically between that and the second postpartum hemorrhage, which happened two weeks later, I think I got five units of blood.

Again, obviously, I'm fine and I recovered pretty quickly because I accepted blood products because I think one of the doctors told me that some women won't accept blood products after a hemorrhage, not necessarily for religious reasons, they just don't want it and they take a very long time to recover. I remember I had to be on iron pills, it was awful. I probably didn't take it correctly or just stop taking it because it was disgusting.

But I just wanted to mention that because I know some of you listening are pregnant, some of you may just have had a baby. And so I just want to tell you if you're feeling overwhelmed, if you're feeling emotionally labile which means like your mood is really up and down, you feel like you cry for no reason, basically, if you are not feeling yourself.

Now, listen, I think everyone who has a baby feels a little off because you're not sleeping. If you think or want support, get it, please. It's okay. It's normal. In fact, what I just said, it's normal, is so important because none of us would think anything if your friend said, oh yeah, I went to the doctor and

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I have high blood pressure, I'm on a medication. People would just say it very nonchalantly.

Why aren't we talking about taking care of one of our most valuable organs? Obviously, they're all valuable, can't live without the heart, can't live without the brain either. And if you are not thinking properly, if you are not feeling like yourself and you're thinking and your mood is impaired, I mean, nothing else really matters.

And here's how, looking back, sort of like the, I don't want to say warning signs, but here's the thing, as a coach I am used to coaching myself. I still get coached by another person because I still have a human brain, obviously, and sometimes it's just hard for me to see things. But I am able to coach myself on many things.

And I noticed it kind of stopped working. Meaning I kept thinking this isn't working, if I just believe harder it would be, you know, what's wrong with me, et cetera. And I guess the best way to explain it is that thought work or coaching wasn't working. And I also want to make this really important point, coaching doesn't work when your brain is not well, okay? I just could not have access to certain thoughts.

And so this actually leads me to the next thing I want to talk about because I do get asked a lot, what's the difference between a life coach, a psychiatrist, a therapist? Which one should I work with? Who do I need?

Now, first of all, obviously, I am not a mental health professional. However, this is how I think of it, okay? They're all what I call part of your mental health or your brain team. I like the term brain because I feel like mental health, just that phrase has some stigma.

I think about there are all these trained people that help you optimize your brain. And this is what I sort of like heard about the difference in terms of what, I actually don't even know who said this, but a therapist takes you from suffering to baseline. And a coach takes you from baseline to thriving. But it's not either or, there are, actually I have friends who are coaches,

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some are non-coaches, and they have all three. They have a psychiatrist, a therapist and a coach.

So right now I have coaches, because I work with multiple coaches at different times and I have a psychiatrist. I do not have a therapist, I could probably use one. And so what people are always asking me like, who should I work with first, and like I said it's not either or. Maybe it's all of the above, it really depends on your needs. They all have a place and like I said, I think of it as a team.

Now, the analogy I like to give for this is this, okay, so we all kind of know that like working out, physical fitness is like a thing. But I read that it's actually a modern phenomena. Meaning there was a time not too long ago where people didn't really work out, it wasn't a thing. There wasn't like a gym, or a yoga place, or a Pilates place on every corner. That is relatively recent.

And there's so many different modalities. You know, at one point, I was going to Orangetheory or Barry's Boot Camp, I was going to hot vinyasa yoga, and I was going to SoulCycle, and I had a personal trainer. I think that actually happened all at once at some time, but it wasn't always like that. Clearly, this was when I was single and I had a lot more time.

There's something for everyone and at different price points, right? Because you don't need to pay for any of this, you could just find a workout on YouTube and there's physical therapy. And when I think of pro athletes, they have a team for their body. They all have coaches.

Have you noticed that all pro athletes, and I'm thinking like Olympic athletes, but anyone who's a high performing athlete, they always have a coach, have you noticed? They could be the number one in whatever they do, and they still have a coach. I just want to put that out there because I think sometimes I know people say well, do you always need a coach and why do you even need a coach? It's so they can be at your peak physical performance.

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And I know that they also have like massage therapists, they probably get massages every week, if not a few times a week. They've optimized their nutrition. They have people who stretch them. I mean they have a whole team for their body because that is like their job to perform physically at the top of their game.

And so I'm guessing you're not a pro athlete, obviously I'm not either, but this is how I think about the people that help me with my brain. And I do that for myself, obviously, I'm not in some mind Olympics, I don't even know what that would be.

I do it for myself personally, but I also do it for my clients, right? Because I want my clients to have the best coach. And so I get coached so that I work in a lot of things, obviously, personal stuff, business stuff. But the more I can get out of the way in terms of like me, I think the more effective coach I can be for my clients. And so I really don't feel like there will ever be a time where I don't have some sort of person on my brain team.

Now, that doesn't mean you're always going to have a one on one coach. In fact, I don't have a private coach right now. I have for sure. Right now the coaching I get is all in a group setting. And I have access to the actual coach on different, depending on the program I'm in.

So kind of like what I was saying about working out, there are so many ways to get coached, and many different price points, because I hear a lot of people saying it's expensive. There are very inexpensive ways to get access to coaching.

And when I think of that even word coaching, it's personal development, it's self-growth, it's gaining awareness of yourself, it's learning how to love yourself again. It's so many things, it's hard to even say exactly, like the one thing that coaching can help you with. Obviously, I've drank or drunk the coaching Kool-Aid as a coach and someone who coaches people. And it's because I know how powerful it is because I have been coaching long enough that I have proof of the changes it creates for people.

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And so anyway, if you listen to this you probably are into coaching too so I can probably stop talking about this. But my point today is it's so important to take care of your brain. So, so important. So if you're listening to this and you have been struggling, please do something about it.

And the last thing I want to say, if you are a physician and you are worried about I don't know someone finding out or whatever, unfortunately, what I've heard people do is they only pay cash so there's no paper trail. And sometimes they even use a fake name for their medications because the medications can be tracked, unfortunately.

And what I've heard is that psychiatrists don't really keep detailed notes, you know, obviously, the doctor patient relationship is confidential, but they don't usually take detailed notes to protect the patient in case there is a reason why they would be unsealed.

So I just wanted to put that out there. And a big percentage of people I don't even know, maybe it's 30%, maybe it's 40, maybe it's more are on medication for the brain. And thank God people are doing something about it because like I said, brain is so important. People are on all sorts of other medications for all sorts of other things with their body. And we really need to stop being afraid to take care of our brains.

So I hope you are taking such exquisite care of yours, whether it's having a psychiatrist and or a therapist, and or a coach. I'll leave you guys with that.

And as a reminder, I coach in a group setting inside my program Money For Women. I do some private coaching, I have, you know, not that many spots, I take on a very limited number of clients. And we have the retreat coming out in October and that will be about two and a half days of powerful coaching in a very intimate setting.

And people always ask me like, what is the difference between private and one on one coaching? Actually I want to say this real quick because I'm going to be able to tie in that fitness analogy so it's going to work out really well. So here's the thing, you know how when you go to a group fitness

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class, I'm going to use Orangetheory as an example because it was kind of the last group fitness I did.

So just think of any class where you weren't the only person there working out. You know what's such a bummer about these group fitness classes? You have to work out too to get the benefit. I'm just laughing because of course, right? But meaning you can't just watch people work out and get the same benefit.

But in coaching, in a group coaching format you don't even actually have to get coached directly by the coach to get immense benefit. And here's why, two reasons. One is even if the person getting coached is getting coached about something that has nothing to do with anything in your life, it is still going to be immensely valuable. Because the type of coaching I do and get is about coaching on how you think and how your brain is sort of making sense of things.

And the best part is we all have human brains and all human brains kind of have the same glitches. And so the person you're observing is having a brain glitch in let's just say her relationship. Let's say you don't have that brain glitch, you're like, oh, well, I don't have a relationship problem, but you have a glitch in another part of your life that's kind of the same type of glitch. That's number one.

Number two, the reason why it's so effective and I would even say maybe even more effective than private coaching is like when you are actually getting coached one on one, whether it's one on one or me coaching you in front of a group, sometimes it feels like you're on the spot and you're feeling nervous.

And I guess the best way to say it is like yeah, you're nervous, it might be hard to think about things clearly because, like I said, you're kind of on the spot, your brain is on the spot, right? Meaning that you might be feeling a little agitated and on edge. But when you're watching and hearing someone

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else getting coached, your brain isn't on the spot, so you're more open and receptive.

So I am actually in a group program now and I have actually never gotten coached by the coach, and that's fine. I don't have a problem. In fact, it wasn't until the last class, and we've had several were I actually requested to get coached, I did not get picked and that's fine. But I am getting so much value from just watching other people get coached.

Anyway, I didn't plan to kind of go all into that, but just wanted to explain to you since we're talking about the different ways to take care of your brain, so many different ways to get coaching. It doesn't have to be a certain way.

Okay, well, I will talk to you guys next week. And I will definitely tell you guys what I learned and the insights I've gained after two days with my business coach. Okay, I will talk to you guys next week.

Hey, if you enjoyed this episode and don't want to miss out on new episodes please hit the subscribe button on your favorite podcast app. See you next week.