



## **EPISODE 87: From Allergist to Interior Designer For Physicians**

**With guest Dr. Kricia Palmer**

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HF: Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So, pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You're listening to episode number 87. Today's episode is proof of the power of search engines to find just what or who you are looking for. A few months ago, I was on a call with one of my lovely clients, and she'd been expressing an interest in starting a business doing interior design. She had sent me some photos of a remodel she'd done in her own home, and I could tell she had real talent.

So, I was wondering in my mind, if there were any physicians who had transitioned into this creative area that was completely outside of medicine. I hopped on Google and put

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in “Physician interior designer” in the search bar and crossed my fingers. At the very top of the page to my surprise was “House Calls For Physicians.” I clicked on the link and came to the website of our guest today, Dr. Kricia Palmer, a pediatric allergist who has a business doing interior design for other physicians.

Bingo. I was so excited to find her. And long story short, both my client and I reached out to her and she was incredibly friendly and full of enthusiasm for what she's doing. And she kindly agreed to come on the podcast.

Dr. Palmer will be sharing her story of why she chose interior design over medicine, how she made the transition and what her business is like today. She'll also be giving some tips and advice for any of you with an interest in interior design or starting a business in general. I am very excited to welcome Dr. Kricia Palmer to the podcast. Hi, Kricia, how are you?

KP: Hi, I'm great. It's good to be here.

HF: Yes. I just can't tell you how amazing it was to search for you and you are at the very top of the results.

KP: Oh wow. That's actually good to know.

HF: Yeah, that's great. I've been doing this for over 12 years and I have not had a client transition into this area nor do I know of anybody.

KP: Yeah. I know. I get lots of interesting questions and looks when I tell people that I am a physician, but not practicing. And now, I'm an interior designer. So yeah. Sounds crazy.

HF: Yeah, but it worked for you and I'm very happy to have you come on to share the story of how you got to where you are currently. So, would you like to begin at the beginning?

KP: Sure. Yeah. I'll start at the beginning. It's interesting because people are shocked when they hear, "Oh, I'm a physician, but I went into interior design." It sounds really kind of like you went the total opposite direction, but looking back, growing up, I was always a very creative, artistic kid and I was always drawn more towards the arts, theater, music, dance. And I actually originally went to college as a dance performance major because I wanted to dance on Broadway. I wanted to dance in music videos.

HF: Wow. That's so unusual.

KP: Yeah. So totally different. And I realized I didn't want to teach. And I knew that if I just wanted to perform that was going to be very short lived. I was like, "Well, what am I going to do?" And I've never really been interested in math and science growing up, but I had a great, very influential high school biology teacher. And that's when science and biology started to make sense to me. And I found out that I really enjoyed it. And she really encouraged me all through high school to go to med school. She was like, "You need to go to med school. You would make a great doctor." And at the time I was like, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. But I want to do theater. I want to do dance."

But it stuck in my mind. And so, when I did transition out of dance, I thought I was really drawn to that. I'm an empath, so any career that I have, it has to be of service and helping people. And so, I thought, "Well, I'll go into medicine." So, I did that. I went to medical school, did a residency in pediatrics and then a fellowship in allergy and immunology.

I realized when I was a resident, I think I went through a lot of depression during that time and just was kind of already feeling burned out as interesting as that may sound like so early on, but I wasn't really sure that medicine was a good career fit for me. I missed that creative part of things. And it took me a long time to admit to myself that I was not happy because when you're on the medical track, you're so invested financially and time wise and everything.

And around that time, I had my two boys. And I had just started practice at Arkansas Children's Hospital in pediatric allergy and immunology. And my oldest had some special needs at the time. He has right sided hemiplegia. It's very mild and he's older now and doing great, but at the time he required a lot of therapy and a lot of interventions that I felt like I needed to be there for and felt like I was kind of missing out on that because I was working.

So, I made a difficult decision to leave my job and stay at home with my two boys. And after a few years, I thought, "Well, this would be a great time to go back and do what I really wanted", which I had discovered during residency was interior design. I had never really been exposed to interior design growing up. And I didn't really even realize that it was a thing, but while I was a resident, and I don't know if you remembered this show, there was a show on HGTV called "Trading Spaces."

HF: Oh, yeah.

KP: And that's when I kind of realized, "Oh my gosh, this is amazing. It totally fits my personality." I fell in love with it. And I wanted to be able to do what they did. But it seemed like a fantasy. It seemed something like "I'm in medicine. I can't go do this."

Well, once I kind of slowed down, stayed at home with my kids for a few years, I thought, "You know what? I've got to do what's right for me." Even though I struggled with a lot of different feelings about leaving medicine. And so, I went back to undergraduate school as a non-traditional student and very slowly took one to two classes at a time because my priority at that time was being with my kids. I eventually got my interior design degree. And now I have house calls for physicians where I offer interior design to other physicians.

HF: Wow. There is so much in this story that I would like to go back and pick up on some threads here, because it is a very unusual story. And one thing I'd like you to bring out right now, so we can put some context to this is your Enneagram type.

KP: Yeah. Yeah. I am a type four.

HF: Yeah. We just had two episodes about the Enneagram and the type four is... Well, let me let you tell the listeners what is a type four.

KP: Yeah. I've read about the Enneagram. I'm more familiar with Myers Briggs, but I will tell you what I know and you probably know more than I do. But type four is the individualist. Typically, very individualistic, I always felt like I was kind of different, but didn't have an explanation as to why. More creative, very introspective. I do a lot of pondering about big questions that I can probably never answer. Things like that.

HF: Yes, that's a very good description. They are called the individualist. Some people also refer to them as the artist, even though they're not, not all of them are artistic. They do often have some type of creative side to them. So, you are really into dance and now you're doing design and it is less common for type fours to be in medicine, even though we do find them here. And it's understandable why you may have felt like "I'm not really your average physician. I don't necessarily fit the mold." And then you broke out of the mold.

KP: Exactly. Yeah. And in retrospect, that makes perfect sense. But at the time I thought there was just maybe something wrong with me because I remember being in residency and I felt so alone because I was unhappy. And my perception was that everybody else was doing great. Even though residency and even in early practice is a stressful time, I thought everybody else is doing great and there's something wrong with me because I don't really like what I'm doing. So, I actually felt a lot of guilt about that too.

HF: And that's a common feeling for fours in general, to feel like there's something wrong with them and they don't belong, but they have a uniqueness about them, which is often important for them to express in the world in some way. It could be their writing, acting, poetry. It could be the creation of a business on doing something like you're doing. So, I think you kind of came back to yourself.

KP: Yeah.

HF: And one thing is interesting about your story, which you told me before is that your parents were very supportive of you doing the dance. And you were a dance major. Because a lot of physicians may say, "Well, I was interested in something creative, but my parents said, well, you can be a doctor. And then you can do your creative passion on the side." But that wasn't the case with your parents. However, this teacher was talking to you about becoming a doctor. What do you think it was that teacher was seeing in you that kept her on this path of, "This is what you should do, Kricia?"

KP: I think it was a couple of things maybe. Academically, I always did well in school. So, there was that component of having the ability to go down that road. But the other thing was, like I mentioned before, I've always been an empath. So just pick up on other people's feelings and emotions. Although my teenage boys may disagree, I feel like I'm a pretty caring and compassionate person. So, I think it may have been a combination of those two things that she saw. And so, it was very encouraging to me to go down the medical route.

HF: And that's something else that's true about type fours is they are often intuitive. They're very feeling based so they can really connect with the feelings of other people.

KP: Yeah.

HF: Do you feel that medicine was a mistake for you if you could do it all over again?

KP: No. No. I don't feel like it was a mistake. I don't really find that it's useful to think of it like that. Of course, my natural inclination sometimes is like, "Oh my gosh, how many years? 10 years that I could have been progressing in interior design."

But I don't think I would be where I'm at today had it not been for those experiences. I loved my patients. I was able to help a lot of people. I met my husband in medical school. I love working with physicians now.

So, I feel like that was just a part of my path. Those were just some steps that I had to take. I also learned a lot about myself and really how to be brave enough to step out and do what I really wanted because I felt like for so long, I was just trying to meet others' expectations. And I didn't have anyone that was pressuring me into medicine, but it was almost like I had to just prove that I could do something hard or prove that I could do it to myself. And so, just kind of living up to those expectations. And then I was able to grow and really just be very honest with myself about what I really wanted.

HF: You had mentioned guilt and that's a common thing that physicians feel. How did you come to terms with the guilt that you can feel from taking up a residency spot or leaving your patients and not doing what you invested in doing for the world?

KP: Yeah. I went through a lot of that. In fact, so much so that I sort of hid what I was doing when I went back to interior design school and I was going through that. I would run into some of my colleagues or resident friends or other physicians at the hospital. And they would ask me what I was up to. And I wouldn't tell them about interior design because I was like, "They're going to think I'm crazy."

I did feel guilty because I did take a residency spot. I took a fellowship spot. I'd invested so much time and money into this and then I wasn't going to use it. And I don't really believe that I'm not using it now. It's just in my frame of reference at that time, I felt very guilty about that.

And so, I finally got to the point where I think maturity helped. And I think that I got into life coaching and it made me realize I could spend the rest of my life trying to be this person who I think I should be in medicine or I can just really be honest with myself and do what I need to do for myself. And so finally, once I really embraced that, then I felt the freedom to go my own way, no matter what other people think. Because people are going to think whatever. What they think is more based on them than me. So realizing that really kind of set me free.

HF: Those are such powerful points. And if you're struggling at all with guilt or your identity, go back and listen to what she just said. Kricia pointed out that when she stopped telling herself what she should do or who she should be, she was able to embrace her own truth. And we're always going to do better when we just follow what's true for us, regardless of what other people may think. So, thank you for sharing how that was a pivotal perspective shift for you.

I'm curious how you went from this interest in interior design to this business that you have now where you're helping physicians because that's a very specific niche.

KP: Yeah. Actually, it started when I did my internship, I had to do an internship for my degree and I worked with a designer here locally that's actually very well known in the design world around the country. She is an interior designer and she's also a business coach. And what I realized I was able to get a good view of what the traditional interior design business looks like.

So, when most people think of residential interior design, they think of calling the designer, the designer comes to your house, they design everything, they pick it all out and then they procure all the furniture, everything you need and install it. And that's really just the traditional route. And now as the design industry has changed and we have social media, digital marketing, I realize you really need something that makes you stand out or set apart.





And so, she was really a great mentor to me in looking at how can you develop a niche in interior design based on who you are and your experiences, and look at the business model in a different way, because a lot of that traditional business model, it's difficult to really make a lot of money to make a living in that way. It's difficult.

But now with niching down and digital marketing, it's made it a lot easier. So, in working with her, I was like “I can use my experiences as a physician of being burned out of having kids and working and coming home at the end of the day and feeling stressed out and walking into my house where I need to support me and I need it to nurture me to make my life as easy as possible.”

And so, I thought I could bring all that and work with other physicians using my creativity and what I know about interior design to help them build that for themselves. So, then they can go out and serve their patients better so that when they're at home, they're rejuvenated and feel more prepared to go out and do the work that they're wonderful at.

HF: This is such an interesting piece that we don't usually talk about when we're speaking of physician burnout is your environment and how it can really support you. So, I love that you're bringing this in as a resource for physicians.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the income and also the nuts and bolts of having a business like that. But before we dive in, I want to take a quick break and share some resources with you. Don't go away, we'll be right back.

If you are applying to a nonclinical job, it's a great idea to convert your CV to a resume. A well-crafted resume helps recruiters see why you are the right person for the job. My resume kit is a downloadable PDF that walks you step by step through creating an impressive resume of your own. You'll have everything you need, including templates and a bonus on writing a winning cover letter.

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All right, I'm back here with Dr. Kricia Palmer, our guest, and we're talking about her interior design business. Can you tell us a little bit about how your business is structured and if there's a possibility of replacing a physician income?

KP: Sure. Yeah. Right now, my business is structured. I do two main things for those physicians who want to learn how to be their own designer and aren't really interested in hiring a designer. Then I teach them how to do that through my signature course called Design Academy. I teach other physicians how to be their own designer. And then there are others who maybe don't have the interest or the time to do that. And for those, I actually offer interior design services. So, it's really twofold.

HF: I love that you have those options because there are those of us who want to be DIYers and then others, where we want to have someone to hold our hand through the whole process. So, you offer both of these options. And is there enough business when you're focusing just on physicians?

KP: Yes, absolutely. I was actually amazed at how many physicians enjoy doing design and decor. There are several Facebook groups of physicians that are just devoted to that. And so, I think it's so especially important when you're in such a changing high stress career to be supported when you're at home.

HF: I'm not surprised that you told me this because when clients first come to me, they fill out an exercise where they rank different careers that they're interested in. I even have interior design on there and a good number actually checked that box.

KP: That is so interesting. It is. I've actually had probably at least 10 people over the past two to three years, my business is relatively young. I just started it a few years ago, and they've reached out to me saying, "Hey, I really love interior design. And I think I might want to transition to that either as a side gig or transition full time to replace their medical career. How do I get started?" So, I was really surprised to hear that it wasn't just me. There are others out there that are really interested in these more creative fields.

HF: Yeah. What do you tell physicians when they ask about this question of, "Can I replace my income or will I need to keep this as a side gig?"

KP: Yeah. A couple of thoughts on that. It's absolutely possible to replace your income. I would say that in the traditional business model that I mentioned before, where you work locally, you go to someone's home, you design for them, you buy the furniture and all of that, that's a much longer road and it's much more challenging to be profitable in that way.

But now with developing, there's this kind of new design business model, that's emerging in the design world where you do develop a niche and there can be very, very specific niches. There are some designers that I know that only design for aging in place. There are designers that I know that only design for wealthy bachelors. So, getting really specific. And your first thought is that that's going to be too narrow, but if you can find those people that actually will make your business more profitable. So, if you are willing to open up and learn those new techniques and learn those things about business, then it's absolutely possible to replace your income.

HF: And I guess that partly depends if they're a neurosurgeon or if they're a primary care physician.

KP: Yeah, that's true. But you'd be surprised. I think that if you're willing to really think out of the box and think big, not that it's not hard, the good thing is there's really no limit. I feel like as physicians, we have limits on how much you can make like neurosurgeons in this state make this much and that's it. Or family medicine docs in this state make this much.

And so, it seems like there is this cap, although I would argue that a lot of that is kind of self-imposed. When you allow yourself to step out of the box and you have your own business, I truly believe that there's no limit. You can scale your business. And I know designers who are definitely replacing the salary of a neurosurgeon. That takes a while to get there, but it's definitely possible.

HF: I'm so glad you said that because it really is true about being an entrepreneur. And we have to break out of that mold of thinking of traditional hours and your time for your compensation when you can scale in so many different ways.

One question that is coming up and sure some people might be thinking about is, do you need to get certified? Do you need to get a license? Do they have to go do some extensive training like you did?

KP: That's a great question. And it's one that I'm asked a lot. For residential interior design, you do not need a degree. I went that route because I felt like I wanted that extra education. I wanted that experience, but it's not a requirement. There are only a couple of states, I believe, that have like a license law where you have to be licensed. Otherwise, if you're doing residential interior design, you don't.

And if you're doing commercial design, like if you're interested in design for healthcare facilities, offices, that sort of thing, you do need a degree for that. But yeah, otherwise, you can totally teach yourself, there are lots of online courses that you can take that will

give you the skills. And then of course, the most part is just practicing those because the more you do it, the more you make mistakes, the better you get at it.

HF: That's really great news because that's a low barrier to entry.

KP: Absolutely.

HF: Yeah. We're getting close to time here. I'd love it if you could give us some steps for a physician who might be interested in this area, how they can explore this niche and find out if it might be a good fit for them.

KP: Yeah. I think the best thing to do is to just start doing it. Lots of times we kind of feel like we have to have everything mapped out and have this big elaborate plan, but I found that the best way to do it is just to dive in.

And so, what you could do is find a family member or a friend that wants you to help them with their space and just start helping them. Go over there, look at it, make suggestions, try different things out and just get your feet wet and start doing it. And that'll give you a good sense of what it's like. And if you like it, if you're enjoying it and you want to pursue that further, that's exactly how I started as I was getting my interior design degree. I had people asking me for help and I just started doing it. And I actually learned a lot during that time.

HF: Ah, that is my favorite tip because that saves you time and money. You just get in there, you get your feet wet, and you get a lot of information back. Do I really like to do this? So, this is a fabulous tip and we can always find someone who wants our help for free. That's not going to be a problem.

KP: Yeah. That will always be there for sure.

HF: Let's say they go ahead. They help someone redesign their family room or a kid's bedroom and they feel good about it. What would they do next?

KP: I think you decide either if you feel confident in your skills and you're good, you can keep going and that's the start of your business. And so, it's easy once again at that stage to get really bogged down with confusion, like "What do I do next?" And I think the thought there that we always think is "There must be a right path. There must be a right way to do it."

And I can totally see how that makes sense to us as physicians. Because when you go through medical training, everything is lined out for you. You know you've got to go to school, you know you've got to take step one, step two, step three. You've got to take your boards.

And in any kind of business, especially interior design, it's not all mapped out. But realizing that there's no one right path and just asking yourself, "What do I need to do next? What do I need to learn next? Do I want to go back to get a degree? Do I want to just take a different undergraduate degree or do I want to take a different online course? Do I just want to start doing it and continue doing it?" So, I would say the next thing to do is just to keep taking action, even if it's just one small step at a time, because everybody's path is going to look a little bit different.

HF: Yes. Yes. These are excellent points. We learn from doing. We can get into analysis paralysis and always find reasons why we shouldn't do it or it's not going to work. But when you're in action, like you said, you're learning.

So just to wrap up here, I'm curious since you've been through this whole entrepreneurial arc, for those out there, thinking about a business idea, but maybe telling themselves, "Well, I'm not an entrepreneur. I don't have that in my blood." What would you say to them from what your own experience has been?

KP: I think that number one, those thoughts are completely normal because that's what our brains tell us. "I'm not an entrepreneur, it's not in my blood." But I would argue that you are, if you believe you are. And yeah, you're not going to be perfect. You're going to make mistakes. You're going to have failures, which I've learned to deal with. I wasn't really good at failure. When I started this process, I became very good at it. But that's how you grow and that's how you move forward.

I would say really become aware of those thoughts when you're telling yourself "I can't do this. I'm not an entrepreneur." Because those will just lead to inaction. You'll get stuck and you won't take any action. If you're just aware of that and say, "Oh, there's my brain again, telling me that I'm not an entrepreneur." Instead replace that with "It's possible that I can learn how to become an entrepreneur." And if you believe that and just really focus on that thought, that's going to drive the action that you need to take to get to where you want to be.

HF: Beautiful. And it reminds me of this quote that I saw the other day that just popped up on my phone in my meditation app. And it was "What you believe, you experience." And that's exactly what you said. So powerful.

Well, this has been such a great conversation. I know there are going to be physicians out there who want to reach you. What's the best way for them to find you, Kricia?

KP: They can find me online at [housecallsforphysicians.com](http://housecallsforphysicians.com). They can find me on Instagram and Facebook. I have a private Facebook group called House Calls for Physicians or they can email me at [kricia@kricia.com](mailto:kricia@kricia.com).

HF: And I will put all of this in the show notes so you can reach out to her. And thank you again. This has been so much fun. I'm really proud of you and you're very inspiring.

KP: Thank you so much. It's been great talking with you.



HF: You're very welcome. I think I have to call you for a consult.

KP: Hey, I'm ready.

HF: All right. Okay guys. Thanks so much for listening. I'm really happy to have you here. And I just want you to be inspired and feel like you can follow whatever that itch is that you want to scratch and it can work out. So don't forget as always to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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