



## **EPISODE 99: The Value Of Pursuing Your Passion When You're In The Trenches**

**With guest Dr. Debra Blaine**

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DB: "It's about the Russian oligarchs hack our EMRs, and they extort millions of dollars from the patients. And then they murdered them. That turned out to be my plot."

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 99. Today I have a very inspiring guest who is going to talk with us about the value of pursuing a passion while you're still in the trenches. Our guest is family medicine physician Dr. Debra Blaine, who will have published her third novel by the time this episode airs.

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I have to say I'm a big fan of Debra's books. She's an excellent writer and I'm excited about the third one coming out called "Beyond the Pillars of Salt." Dr. Blaine has written all of her books while working as a busy urgent care physician, finding time when she could to write and publish these three books in five years.

Debra is going to address various questions on this topic, such as how to make time for your passion, what to do if you don't feel passionate about anything, what are the benefits of following a passion and why it's hard for a lot of physicians to indulge in something like this. I'm very excited and honored to welcome Dr. Debra Blaine to the podcast. Hey Debra, how are you?

DB: Hey, thanks for having me, Heather.

HF: I am so excited. I have your two books right here. I'm holding them up. You can see them. I love them. And I have to tell the listeners. I met Debra virtually a while back when she hadn't published anything. And then we met in person at a writer's conference and she had gone there. She didn't know if she'd ever published anything. And since that time, it's amazing to see what she's doing. So I'm excited to have her share more about how she got here and why following this passion has been a life changing thing for her. So, Debra, take us back to that time when you had no idea this is going to be where you were going.

DB: Yeah. When I met you and I think we had one session together, and you told me about the SEAK conference, and to be honest, I was looking for something different that had nothing to do with medicine. And so, I looked at the writer's conference and I went there and that was in February of 2018. I think I'd only written about 60 words by then.

HF: 60 words.

DB: It was like 60 words because I gave them to the person who would be my mentor and I didn't expect to ever hear from him, but he emailed me back in like five days. And I didn't really know what I was going to do except I wanted to do something creative and something completely different.

And I also wanted to tell the story of our suffering. That was kind of a lot of what was behind writing that first book. I was kind of on a mission that what we go through in the clinics is just... When I tell people who are not doctors, they can't believe it. It's like, "I can't believe you saw 50 patients in one day." But to another doctor or orthopedist it's "Yeah, yeah. That's what we do." But it's really taxing. So I wanted to tell the story and that's how I started on this.

HF: Well, it's interesting because I don't know if you remember this Debra, but at that conference, Jim Mangraviti, who was one of the two hosts of the conference, he said, "Good things come to those who write."

DB: He was right.

HF: Yeah. No pun intended. But yeah, that's the powerful words. I'd love it if you could tell the listeners just a little bit about what that first book Code Blue is about and tell the story of how writing that book actually made you aware of how you were feeling about medicine before you even knew it yourself in a way.

DB: Kind of. I knew I was unhappy, but I really wanted to tell people this is what a corporate medical institution looks like from the inside. And in fact, my original title, which is now the subtitle, is "The Other End of the Stethoscope." And so I wanted people to know what happened on the other end of the stethoscope. Writing a whole book was a daunting thing. I couldn't even conceive of, but I started writing these little patient encounters, little vignettes. And I even had, I think it was, Sorche, when I went up to her,



she said, “We don't do vignettes. We don't do memoirs.” I was like, she just kind dismissed me.

But I started stringing together all these different encounters that would illustrate how difficult it is to do good medicine, how pressured we are in those clinics and how hard it is to get things authorized and how much I wanted to give someone a nebulizer, but she couldn't afford it. And back in the old days, we just gave them the nebulizer, because we already paid for the nebulizer machine and the medicine costs about \$1.12 but when you work for a corporation, “Oh no, you got to get all kinds of permission.” At one point I emailed them and said, “Fine. If you don't want to give it to her, I'll pay for it.” And it kind of shamed them.

I wrote all these things, but then I didn't want to make it non-fiction because it could be really liable. So I had to make it a fiction. And that's when I met Rich Krevolin at the conference and he really mentored me through the whole process of writing a suspense of fiction. It's about the Russian Oligarchs hack our EMRs and they extort millions of dollars from the patients and then they murdered them. And so, that turned out to be my plot. And I came up with that on the rooftop of the hotel because I went to a workshop with Rich Krevolin and my homework, we all had different homework, was to come up with a plot to tie everything together.

But what happened was, as I wrote that book and as I was finishing the book, the doctor in the book, she hates what she's doing. She realizes how much she absolutely hates her job. Because when you write a book, you put yourself into that world. You have to, in order to create that world, you actually become the characters as you sort of navigate through the story. And after I wrote the book, it was like right there in black and white, looking at me that this doctor in the book hates what she does. And as this doctor who wrote the book, hates what she does and I couldn't ignore it anymore. Before then I was just like on autopilot, doing what I thought was expected of me to do. And it gave me the opportunity to think, well, maybe I don't have to do this. Maybe I could be happy



some other way. And make a living some other way.

HF: Yeah. I love Code Blue. And I'll share that I hadn't read a fiction book in over 20 years. I was just like "I don't read fiction. I need to read all these self-help books and things like that." But I read it and I just loved it. And it got me into just being able to be in another story and learn from the experience. So, big shout out for your books.

DB: Thank you so much.

HF: All right. Now I'd like to continue on with your story, but start answering some of these questions that we wanted to ask such as what are some of the benefits, some of the more obvious, but also unexpected ones that you started noticing from following this passion.

DB: One of the really nice things is that I wasn't stuck doing the same thing all the time. I was very unhappy as an urgent care clinician. And by writing, I found there was a whole other world for me to be involved in. I got to know authors, I got to know publishers, I got to become part of a story that I could create. And it's nice when you create the story, because you decide where it's going. Now, you created the characters and like in *Undue Influences*, there's one character I ended up really not liking by the end of the book. And so, in *Beyond the Pillars of Salt*, I killed her off.

You have control over the universe. Because it's like creating another universe that you can step into. Also, I learned so much about myself when I write, because I have to sort of delve into... When I write, especially if I'm writing dialogue or if I'm doing backstory, I have to become that character. And sometimes the character does things that I didn't expect them to do, but they're teaching me about themselves. And it's probably always some part of me. In order for me to relate to that character well enough to draw them so to speak, there's got to be some part of that character in me that I can relate to or tap into. And I feel like it makes me a broader person. It gives me a greater understanding of

other people. So people who used to annoy me, perhaps, I suddenly realized that this character sounds like so and so. But as I created the backstory for the character, I started to think, “Well, I wonder if this person, who annoys me, maybe this goes on for them too.” And I start to understand them better.

HF: That's very interesting. And there's some parallels I think people can make to just following passion in general, that you start learning more about yourself, your world can expand, meet new people. How did it change how you felt about your work?

DB: Pluses and minuses, it took the focus of my work. It took the focus off being just a doctor and that being like that's who I am and then I happened to also be a mother and all these other things. But it made me a doctor and a writer and a mother and a cat rescuer. And I started to see myself from more than one angle. And that's very liberating because then when things don't go so well at work, it's not devastating the same way. It's just one part. It's just one role that I play. It's not who I am. It's not the sum total of my being. And I think that doctors in particular have a tendency to define ourselves as doctors and to put all these restrictions on ourselves as being a doctor.

But the other thing it did was it made me recognize that I have these paradigms about who I'm supposed to be. And it's really hard. Everybody does. When we grow up, our parents set the paradigm first. This is what a good girl does or what a good boy does. And this is how you should live your life and you can dream, but you can only dream these dreams, because these are really unreasonable. But I started to question, well, maybe I don't have to stay in that little space. I can color outside the lines. I can be more than I thought that I was entitled to be. It gave me permission to grow.

HF: It's interesting. We're seeing a lot of benefits coming out that we might have thought, “Oh, well, you'll publish a book. You might make some money. You might have more notoriety if you want in a certain niche.” But there's all these things that really relate to who you are as a person and how you see yourself in your world.



Before we go on to the next one, which is going to be about, “Well, how do you find the time when you have no time?” I just want to stop for a short break to tell you about some resources. Don't go away. We'll be right back.

It makes me happy to share free information with you, such as this podcast. If you'd like to have additional free content, you can go to the Doctor's Crossing website and check out the freebie tab at the top of the page. Here, you can access a downloadable career transition starter kit as well as guides on topics such as interview prep, resumes, chart review, telemedicine, pharma, and medical writing, with more on the way. If this sparks your interest, you can find these resources under the freebie tab at [doctorscrossing.com](http://doctorscrossing.com). Now back to our podcast.

We are back here with Dr. Debra Blaine, triple time author, and we are talking about how do you find time for your passion when you feel pulled in a lot of directions and there isn't any time? Help us Deb.

DB: Okay. I had a mantra when I write my books, which is, it's not going to write itself. I used to tell myself that because for me it's about inertia. The reason I don't get started is because well, I don't have three hours to sit down and write. Well, do you have 20 minutes, Deb? I've got 20 minutes, so I'm going to sit down and start. And I think it's about putting ourselves as a priority. We have a tendency to put everyone else in life. Our kids, our spouse, our job, the dog, the cat and then at the end of the day, if I have any time and energy left over, I'll write. Well, that doesn't work for me because I used to put it off and put it off. I was always last on the list and that could be for exercise. It could be for writing. It could be for anything that I wanted to do just for me.

So I started changing that around and saying that the things that were really important to me, I need to do first. It reminds me of when I was in college, there was a lot of reading I liked to do that had nothing to do with my classes. And so, I used to read what I

wanted to read first because I knew that I was always going to get around to it before I needed to have it done. I may procrastinate doing my homework or whatever, but I would get it done. So I was going to read the things I wanted to read first and then I would read what was required for the class. And that actually worked pretty well for me to be honest, but I stopped doing that.

Now I've started to do that again. I need to put myself up there on the list and get to doing that first. And then if somebody has a problem with it unless the house is burning down, I'm sorry. You tell people you're scheduling this time for you.

HF: What would you say to someone who says "I'm up in the morning with the kids, I try to do some exercise, I get going with my day, I come home, there are kids, dinner, and then I'm exhausted?" Where do they find the time?

DB: That's a tough question. I think the younger your children are, the harder it is. Your teenage kids probably don't want to spend too much time with you anyway, which could be good or bad. But I think you need to schedule it and you need to sort of stand firm. If your kid had a piano lesson from 03:00 to 04:00 o'clock you would make sure to be at the piano lesson and tell everyone else in the house, no, leave little Jamie alone. And she needs to practice her piano or she needs to have her piano lesson. And so I think telling people in the household that this is my time that I'm going to write. So I just need you guys to respect that and I'll be back out at the top of the hour.

It's an amazing thing. It's like the way we treat ourselves is the way other people treat us. They do it unconsciously. When we make ourselves a priority, when we change the way we see ourselves in the world, other people see us differently. If you tell people in a really nice loving way "I love you but from 3:00 to 4:00 o'clock I need to do this. So you guys please figure it out." And you go do it. And it's amazing. People will be, "Oh, okay. That's mom's time." It's not a lot of time but we have to first change our opinion of



ourselves, our image of ourselves. And when we do that and we see ourselves as a person who's entitled to have some time, then people treat us accordingly.

HF: Yes. You're making some really incredible points. So go back, rewind this, listen again if you're multitasking and not prioritizing yourself here and listen, because this is so key, it's how you'd see yourself. And I remember hearing someone say to me, so I can't claim credit for this, but they said "Don't be someone who meditates. Be a meditator, then you're owning it." Don't be someone who writes, say you're a writer or you're an artist. Like we say doctor, we don't say I'm someone who does doctoring. We are doctors. So own it and embrace it. And I also love how you mentioned letting the people in your world know this is important to me. I need you to honor it because I'm honoring it.

DB: Yeah. I can't remember who said this, but don't play an extra in your own movie. In your head, in your image, you are the movie. So, you should be the star. That doesn't make you arrogant or conceited or anything like that. It just means you put yourself in your proper place. Everyone has their own movie. You have one too. So you need to honor yourself in that movie.

HF: Exactly. Right. You don't want to pay someone else to live your life. Okay. So let's go on to the next one, which I think it's a common one. What if you don't feel passionate about anything?

DB: I think when we don't feel passionate about anything it's because we're not allowing ourselves to feel anything. We tend to be on autopilot. We just kind of do what we've been doing all this time. It's kind of scary to find out what you're passionate about because then you may have to do something about it. Like when I realize that I hate what I'm doing and I hate this job. And then I did actually ultimately quit for a while.

But in order to get in touch with what we're passionate about, first, we have to quiet all the mental chatter, all the things that are trying to distract us. Habits are an amazing

thing. It's like they just keep us in this rut of going about our lives. When we start to change our lives, it could be really uncomfortable. And sometimes our minds will do all kinds of things to keep us from feeling uncomfortable.

When you find a passion, you want to go after it. There might be this thing inside you saying "You're not really allowed to do that. Or that's too much fun." Sometimes I'll walk into a patient's room and they're all laughing and I'll just kid with them. And I'll say "This is a doctor's office. You're having way too much fun in here." And they'll laugh, but they don't care because they're just the family who's visiting.

But the whole idea that we have this preconceived idea of how we're supposed to feel, what we're supposed to be allowed to engage in. And so, I think when you can't find what you're passionate about, it's because you haven't really given yourself permission. The whole meditation thing really helps. You don't have to do the transcendental meditation or anything. You can just sort of sit with yourself quietly and try to remember, think back to what you used to do as a kid or a teenager or in your twenties. What did you like to do then? And when was the last time you did it and what did you like about that thing that you did? Maybe you can't do the exact same thing right now, but what was it that made you feel really good? What was so fun about it? And can you reproduce that somehow in your life now?

And always with the idea that it's okay to enjoy yourself. And you don't have to enjoy yourself just the way everybody else does. You don't have to just go out and drink and get sloppy and then come home and start working again the next day. You can actually find the things that you love. And when you do that, then you start to connect with other people who do that and you meet other people and that expands your world also.

HF: I think you're absolutely right. And that can be a path to passion, which is, you may not be able to go from "I'm miserable and burned out" to "I have a passion." You just start with doing some things that give you some pleasure. Even the very little amount, just start in that direction.

And something else that I might see happening to people when they think of something they might really like to do, there's this feeling of "I don't even want to try because if it doesn't work out, I'm going to be disappointed." So they're trying to avoid disappointment by not even risking having joy.

DB: Right. That's really sad because you certainly can't do it if you don't try it.

HF: Right. It'll never happen.

DB: You'll never achieve something that you don't try. And so, in my coaching sessions, when somebody does that, I say, "Well, okay, so what if you fail? So what?"

HF: You learn. You learn. It's not failing.

DB: Yeah. But sometimes it's like there's this sense of, "If I fail, there's something really terrible about that. I'm not allowed to fail at something. I'm not allowed to not make it. If I can't draw this picture right in the drawing class that I'm taking for fun." But why do you care if you didn't do well? You're doing it just for fun. But it's ingrained. "I have to be." I think doctors especially, we have to succeed. We have to be in the top 2% of our class. If you're learning to garden, it doesn't matter.

HF: Yeah. Pulled out that plant, thought it was a weed, get another one.

DB: Yeah. It doesn't matter. But we have to give ourselves again, permission to expand ourselves into the world.

HF: Well, this is already a nice segue into the last question, which is why do physicians in particular have trouble indulging in something that they love or a passion?

DB: Well, I think because we have this idea in our heads of what we were supposed to be as doctors. And there are a fair number of us who kind of gotten away from that. Sometimes it's a matter of being able to do doctoring in a different way. When I write, I'm not writing just fiction for stories. I'm actually trying to say something. I'm actually trying to get people to think about something that might heal wounds or move the Zeitgeist along in a different way. I'm not necessarily successful, but to try to create a message. So, it's more of a psychological kind of treatment than it is a physical treatment. I don't see it that different. It's just not bodies, it's minds that I'd like to be able to influence in a positive way.

But I think that again, we just don't see ourselves often enough as something or someone that can do those things. That's allowed to do those things. And we're allowed to do those things. That's the whole point.

HF: Yeah. And I think a lot of what you're really talking about Debra so eloquently is it's becoming a whole person when we really follow our passion, we're following our heart. And that is what often leads us in where we're meant to go. What's really in alignment with who we are. So, if you think about it more in terms of "This is helping me be who I'm meant to be", following passion rather than indulging something that can feel selfish or not productive. It's just part of our evolution of bringing all that we can into the world.

DB: One of the things I like to remind people is that I ask people to write their eulogy when I coach them. When you are laid to rest, which should be many, many, many, many years from now, what would you like people to say about you? What would you like your legacy on this planet? There's that other quote that I can't remember who said, "Most people tiptoe through life hoping to make it safely to death."

HF: Oh, wow.

DB: And they just don't deviate from that path. But in fact when you get to that destination of death and you were going to look back, don't you want to see that you didn't tiptoe? That you ran or you jumped or you swam, and that you did things that you wanted to do? And we don't get a second chance. We don't, this is it. It might not be it, but we have to live as if it is. If somebody believes in reincarnation, I don't believe in reincarnation. I didn't believe it in any of my previous lives either. So, I'm sure that, but that was supposed to be a joke.

But we have to look at our lives as a whole, not just at this moment, because in this moment we're on autopilot. And when we're on autopilot, we're not really living. And it's good to be on autopilot for some things like if you're driving the car while your kid's talking to you in the car. There's a certain amount of automatic driving and things that will alert you to come out of that state. And if you're evaluating a patient, especially a very sick patient, you're a little bit on autopilot because there's certain things you're going to go through because you go through that with every single patient. And that's how you figure out what they need.

But you don't want to be walking through your neighborhood when the sun is setting on autopilot. You want to look up at the sky. You want to walk at the beach or you want to be there and throw a football around with your son or daughter. There's a time to just sort of exit that automatic behavior. And that's how we learn to enjoy our lives. And the journey is so much more important than the destination.

HF: Yeah. Lots of great stuff in there. And as you were talking, it just made me think that when you follow your passion, you're connecting to your heart.

DB: Exactly.

HF: And often our heart may go to sleep if we haven't really been able to listen to it and honor it and just saying, "I'm going to do something that matters to me that's important

starts that process of waking up and can get us out of autopilot.” So for no other reason just than to wake up to yourself can be a reason to follow something that really matters to you or calls to your heart.

DB: And sometimes it's a little bit difficult if you haven't done it in a long time. It's like having a relationship with your cat. Your cat wanted you to play and wanted you to play and you were busy, busy, busy, and then you go over later in the day you want to play and then your cat looks at you like, “Oh yeah. Now you want me to play?” And you have to sort of ease them into it and entice them if you have cats. Sometimes we act that way with ourselves I think. All these years I wanted to be out there doing stuff and I don't remember what I wanted to do. And now you want to do stuff? Okay, we'll start slow. This is fun. So you may have to sort of tease it out of yourself a little bit in the beginning.

HF: That is such a great metaphor. It's like the heart can be a jilted lover. Like, “Oh, now you want to talk to me. Forget you.”

DB: Well, our bodies are like this sometimes. I used to be a great racquetball player, but put me on the court now and it'd be like, “Ah, yeah, I don't think so.”

HF: Yeah. So, we have to kind of nurture this relationship with ourselves. This has been a wonderful conversation. I would love it if you could let the folks know how they can find your books and a little bit more about you.

DB: Well, thank you. This has been absolutely wonderful. I always love talking to you, Heather.

HF: Likewise, Deb.

DB: Anybody can go to my website, which is [debrablaine.com](http://debrablaine.com). And you can find my books there, or you can go on Amazon and just put in Debra Blaine under books. I think by the

time this airs, they will all be up. And I'm also doing my third book, the first two books I used the hybrid publisher, but in my third book, I decided I didn't want to have to wait so long to get my book published. So I did it myself and I formed my own little company, the Very Indie Press and I am now adding to my coaching services, being able to guide people through the self-publishing process. I'm not an editor, I'm not editing anyone's books, but I can help them find editors and on their own, but I can guide them. And then cover designers. And then there are programs that format your manuscript, and then ways how you can go about platforming them.

I can help people do that and it would just cost so much less money and take so much less time and you have so much more control. So, that's another thing that I'm doing. But I also coach. I coach people on the kinds of things we just talked about of kind of finding themselves and their passions.

HF: Excellent. Well, I'll make sure to link to your books and how to get in touch with you in the show notes. I'm really excited for your book coming out. And like I said, by the time the podcast is out, it will be up Beyond the Pillars of Salt, Debra Blaine.

DB: It's going to be a little bit disturbing because it's a dystopian fiction and it's kind of like what could happen to us if we don't wake up. We have to wake up and we have to become more worthy human beings or it's going to be bad.

HF: Okay. All right. Well, thanks so much for coming on again, to talk to us about why it's so important to follow your passion. So don't forget guys to carpe that diem. I'll see in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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