



EPISODE 124 You Don't Have To Hit A Bullseye With Your Career Change

With guest Dr. Kimberly Hartzfeld

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KH: “In one of our conversations, I had told you that I bought a textbook on functional medicine and you said, Kim, that's a red flag. And I thought, is it?”

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 and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You're listening to episode number 124. I've talked before on the podcast about how you don't need to hit a bullseye when you are making career changes, meaning you don't have to find the perfect fit right out of the gate.

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What's important is that you are moving forward in a direction that is more in alignment with who you are as a person and how you want to be spending your time professionally. And that can be a moving target as your priorities shift.

Sometimes we hit a bullseye on the first try, but it's not necessary at all. It's fine to be somewhere on the target. Truth be told, even if you miss that target completely, you'll gain a lot of valuable information and can reassess your site. We learn from doing and getting in action. Overthinking leads to analysis paralysis. Can anybody relate with that? I certainly can.

Our lovely guest today is going to share her own personal story of making some career changes that continue to evolve as she explores her interests and priorities and tries out different ways of using her knowledge and abundance skills.

In just a minute, I will be joined by OB-GYN physician Dr. Kimberly Hartzfeld. Dr. Hartzfeld practiced as an OB-GYN physician for over nine years before deciding she wanted to open a hybrid functional medicine practice for women.

We're going to hear about what prompted her to go in this direction as well as a more recent shift into working for a telemedicine company that focuses on functional medicine and wellness.

We learn so much from the true stories of our colleagues that illustrate how there is not one right way to have a career or find out what's possible for us. So, without further ado, let's dive in. It is with great delight and gratitude that I welcome Dr. Kimberly Hartzfeld to the podcast. Hi Kim. How are you?

KH: Hi, Heather. I'm good. How are you?

HF: It's great to see you. We worked together for a period of time and I never got to see you.

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KH: It's nice to put a face with the name. Yes. I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

HF: Absolutely. And thank you so much. So let's go back in time when it was in 2019 I believe when you first reached out to me. Would you like to share a little bit about what was going on?

KH: Sure. In 2019, I was feeling a little lost. I had done OB for about nine years, and as time went on, the stress and the sleep deprivation started wearing on me, and I knew that I couldn't keep doing this. And so, I had a few colleagues around me that were giving up OB, which I never even knew was an option. So I thought, "Okay, I will do this and I'm sure I'll get more sleep and be happier." And so, I dropped OB in 2016 and started doing gynecology only.

And as time went on, I realized, "Well, no, this isn't it either." I was still doing call, I was still doing surgeries. There was still a lot of stress involved nights and weekends and I just was not happy. And so, I didn't know what to do. I figured "These are the only skills I have. What else can I do?"

And so, at that point I started going online and looking for options to get out of medicine. And at that point I came across your website and thought, "I think and hope that she can help." So that's how I reached out to you and started my transition.

HF: I know it's not easy to be any kind of physician, but I really think OB is a challenging specialty. Were you having any adverse effects on your health because of the sleep deprivation and the stress and the schedule interruptions?

KH: Yes, absolutely. And that's part of the reason I was looking for something else. Over time, as I got into my forties, the sleep deprivation was wearing on me. I was tired, I just wanted to lay on the couch when I got home. I remember my partner saying, "Come on, let's go do things." And I didn't want to go do anything.

And so, it started to impact my life and I started having these mild chronic things going on with my health that nobody could figure out, and everybody would say, "You're fine." And I thought, "No, I'm not fine." And so, I started investigating things on my own, and at the same time, noticing that I had a lot of patients that had these autoimmune disorders that really had no cure, and all I could do was write them a prescription for a medication.

And it just didn't seem like I was helping them. I thought this traditional medicine is failing us. And so, I started to look into my own health and in researching I found functional medicine.

HF: We've talked a little bit about functional medicine on the podcast, but a lot of people aren't familiar with it. How would you describe functional medicine?

KH: Functional medicine is a personalized whole approach to healthcare and to health. It basically looks at how and why somebody has an illness and we try to restore health by addressing the root cause of the illness.

HF: What kinds of conditions does functional medicine treat and help patients with?

KH: Oh, gosh. It really runs the gamut of everything. Whether it's hormone imbalance or cardiovascular issues or metabolic syndrome, autoimmunity. Really any condition that's chronic, you can try to whittle down the root cause and try to restore balance and health.

HF: If it's not too personal to ask you, then, did you pursue this kind of approach for your own health?

KH: I did, yes. And I was able to successfully take care of my own health issues just by doing diet and lifestyle changes. I had seen various physicians who couldn't find anything wrong with me, but yet there were real physical symptoms going on, and when I



changed the way I ate and the things that I did in terms of my lifestyle, my symptoms resolved.

HF: That's wonderful. And I think in some ways this led you to some of these changes that you made. So, what happens next?

KH: In terms of my career change, at that point, when I found functional medicine, I really didn't know what I was going to do with it. I just thought I'm going to incorporate this into my GYN practice and help patients along the way. But I was still not happy doing GYN.

And so, I found you, and I remember one of our conversations, I had told you that I bought a textbook on functional medicine, and you said, "Kim, that's a red flag." And I thought, "Is it?" And it was right in front of my face. And that kind of gave me the little push to make that change more into functional medicine. And after that, I went on to get my certification in functional medicine, and shortly afterwards I started my own functional medicine hybrid women's clinic.

HF: I know. So that's a big deal. And when I said red flag, it wasn't as anything bad, but that's just something to pay attention to.

KH: Absolutely.

HF: Yeah. You did something. I often hear clients tell me, "Oh, I have this file that I've been keeping on X, Y, Z or I'm taking this course on photography" or just something that they just sort of casually dropped, but it means that there's some energy flowing in a specific direction, and that's a sign. And obviously it was significant for you because it led you in a whole different direction.

KH: Yes, it was significant and it renewed my passion for medicine and my desire to help people. I've always been a people person. I like helping people, but I was burnt out and I thought "I need to get out of medicine", but it wasn't really that I needed to get out of medicine. I just needed to change how I did medicine and do it in a functional medicine way.

HF: And as I alluded in the intro, it didn't end with your opening this practice, but I'd love it if you could help us understand what that was like for you to do this big venture on your own and then where it ended up leading you.

KH: Sure. I knew nothing about owning my own practice or a business. And so, I dug into the research on how to open your own practice, I talked to people and I was successful in opening it within 90 days, and I had a lot of patients follow me. And so, I was very excited and I thought, "This is it. I'm going to ride this into retirement and I am going to be so happy."

But within a year, I started realizing that owning your own business or medical practice is a whole nother ball of wax. It is a full-time plus job and that you are working nights, you are working when you're on vacation. Those are some of the things, to back up, I should say I was trying to find balance in my life getting out of OB-GYN and I went completely in a different direction going out of balance when I opened my practice. So I knew, "Okay, this isn't it." But I didn't know what to do at that point.

In the beginning, I started thinking, "Wait, am I failing here? I thought this was going to be it." But I realized, "No, this isn't a fail, this is a learning opportunity." And so, I decided to reinvent myself once again.

HF: I love the story. There's so many great elements in it, and it reminds me of this quote that I heard Marie Forleo say, which is, "There's not winning or losing. There's winning and learning." And if someone had said to you, Kim, before you really started this

practice, "It's a big deal to have your own practice. You might have a different kind of work-life imbalance, and I don't think you should do this." What would you have said to them?

KH: That's a really good question. I think I would've said, "Well, I'm going to give this a try on my own and see what happens." Because there really wasn't anything else that I could think of doing at the time. That was my path at the moment. And I think that sometimes in life we want different things. When I came out of residency, I wanted excitement and fun and OB gave that to me. But as I got older, that wasn't what I wanted anymore. I wanted calm and balance.

And so, I think sometimes you get into a venture and it's right for that time in your life, but then things change and you get older and your priorities change and then you need to shift and reinvent yourself.

HF: That's so well spoken. Really, I love what you said. That's your path at the moment. And we don't have the ability, at least maybe not most of us, to really see the future and be able to see how these different puzzle pieces are going to fit together. What you did was probably the perfect thing for you in your path.

KH: Right. I don't regret what I did. In fact, I learned a lot. And I always say never say never. Who knows? Maybe I'll open up another practice in the future, but if I do, I've learned and I would do it differently and it could be a possibility. But right now, I'm happy in my new venture.

HF: Right. So, we have some more dots to connect here.

KH: Yeah.



HF: Tell us just a little bit about what it was like to decide, “Hey, I started this, I invested a lot of time and money and effort into it, but I'm not going to do it?” Because that's a huge decision point too. Getting in but also getting out.

KH: Yes. Well, I was kind of at a crossroad because I didn't know what I was going to do, but I really enjoyed functional medicine. And so, I was looking at functional medicine jobs online to see if maybe that would be an avenue for me to go. Then I wouldn't have to own my own practice, but I could still do it. And at the time, I was flipping through the TV stations one night and I saw a famous person talking about functional medicine and I thought, “That's interesting. This is catching on. Maybe this is how medicine is going to evolve.”

And at around the same time I was on the Institute for Functional Medicine's website and I was thumbing through some of the job opportunities and I came across a telehealth functional medicine company and a job. So, I applied and got the job and I kept my practice open for a little bit and I realized, “Well, there's no overhead here. I don't have to work nights and weekends with a telehealth position.” And so, it kind of evolved in into where I'm at now. And I closed my practice six months after starting that gig.

HF: I love that story because these things that seem like coincidences like, oh, you saw this random famous person on TV talking about functional medicine and then this job posting is that when you really set the intention to be in alignment with your path, I believe that these things come to you by that intentionality. And there it is and it can seem miraculous, but there's so much fun.

And I believe that they happen to all of us, but what really helps is doing what you did is saying, “I am focusing on myself, my priorities. I'm open to change. I'm willing to take risks. I'm not going to be afraid.” And then these things happen.

- KH: I think that's a great way to put it. I think you need to be open to change and I think physicians are smart people. We have a lot of skill sets and sometimes we forget that we have those which can take us in many different directions. And so, I think when one opportunity seems like it's closing, like with my practice I thought, "This isn't going to work", another opportunity presented itself for me. And it's great.
- HF: I want to get in a minute to some of the details about your current job. But I'm curious, Kim, sometimes happens with us is that family well intentioned, hear we're making changes and they want to ask a lot of questions and sometimes they can be fear-based, like, "Oh, do you think you should really start this practice? Or you're really giving up on it now." Did any of that happen with you?
- KH: No, not at all. In fact, my partner is very supportive and he's in medicine as well and he believes that functional medicine is kind of where we should be going. I think after many years in medicine, you start to realize that traditional medicine doesn't have it all figured out. I think getting back to the root of a personalized approach, a whole person approach basically to restoring health is really the way forward.
- HF: And your parents weren't worried about you?
- KH: No, surprisingly not. I'm not sure why, but they said, "You're a smart person, Kim. You follow your heart and you do what you want to do and things will fall into place."
- HF: Could we write your parents? I have some clients. Borrow your parents just for phase. Parents often come around, but sometimes their anxiety can fuel our own anxiety too.
- KH: That is true. I think if this would've happened when I was younger, there would've been a bit more trepidation on their part. But I think now they know that I'm getting older and I can handle things on my own now.



HF: All right. Okay, great. Now, in this telemedicine job that you're doing, can you give us an example of a type of patient you might be helping and what you're helping them with?

KH: Sure. I say a 40 something year old male complains of fatigue, lack of motivation, doesn't want to go to the gym anymore, has reduced libido, also has high cholesterol and high blood pressure. And they just feel like their quality of life is suffering. And so, they might come to us and we run some labs or biomarkers, we get a full intake and we go over different options in terms of optimizing their biomarkers and their health.

HF: And what might you offer this patient?

KH: We kind of break it down into different areas like nutrition and diet and lifestyle and hormones and nutraceuticals. So, for this 40 something year old male, I might look at the labs and their intake form and their goals and say, "Okay, well, your LDL cholesterol and your apolipoprotein B are high. So, let's institute a Mediterranean diet, increase your Omega-3 fatty acids, make sure you're getting a good amount of fiber every day because that will help lower your cholesterol, make sure you're exercising regularly, getting into zone two for your cardiovascular health.

And then from a hormone standpoint, you might offer some DHEA to support your adrenals and your testosterone, depending on where they're at in their life. Maybe offer them some testosterone or some peptides to help support some of their hormone biomarkers and their overall wellbeing.

HF: How long do you get to spend with your patients?

KH: Usually about 30 minutes for the telehealth visit, but prior to that, we will do about 20 to 30 minutes of chart work where we go through everything in their labs, in their intake, and we formulate a plan for them so they get to see the plan ahead of time, but

then we do a deeper dive when we do the telehealth visit and we might adjust the plan accordingly and then go from there in terms of the recommendations.

HF: How are you enjoying this job?

KH: I love it. It's great. We are really helping people restore their health, and by doing that, we're helping them live longer and happier. And so, to me, it's very rewarding. We're not writing a prescription to cover up symptoms. You are helping them get a better diet and lifestyle, adding nutraceuticals that are evidence-based to help optimize certain biomarkers. And of course, hormone balance, that always makes people feel good. I think we're really doing some good. And I think this is how medicine I hope will evolve over time.

HF: I did a podcast before on the telemedicine jobs, and we talked about there's whole variety of areas you can do telemedicine in and mentioned that they're becoming more niche markets such as this one and more integrative functional medicine, lifestyle medicine.

Where do you see your own career going with this? Do you have any thoughts about maybe even having your own telemedicine practice now that you've had a practice but that was a brick-and-mortar practice?

KH: That's a good one. I would say right now, since it's only been a few months since officially closing my practice, I am just focusing on enjoying the moment and caring for the patients that I have in my current company.

I don't know what's going to happen in the future in terms of the next direction, but I'm sure I will reinvent myself again. I can see that happening, not because I'm not happy where I'm at, but I think we want to evolve with what we're doing and grow. And so, that



might be something in my future, having my own telehealth functional medicine practice, because that does keep your overhead down significantly.

HF: Right. And there's so many benefits too, for patients and for physicians, and lab testing can be done in other ways, and we're getting more into monitoring virtually and all these other possibilities. So, the nice thing is you don't have to know what this going to look like.

KH: Right, yeah. Just enjoy the moment and if you decide you're not happy in what you're doing, then just evolve and reinvent yourself.

HF: I think that's a great word, "reinventing." It's showing that we have agency over life. We're not just sort of bobbing along with whatever's happening to us. I want to take a quick break and then come back and ask you a few more questions.

KH: Great.

HF: All right. My dear listeners, as you know I talk sometimes about freebies I have for you. Another freebee that's on my website is one on time management resources, and it accompanies the podcast I did with Dr. Andrew Wilner, where we talked a lot about time management, that was the number 78.

But this freebee that comes with us has a list of books and apps and different resources that are really great for optimizing your time. You can find that at www.doctorscrossing.com/timemanagement. I'll link to that in the show notes. You can also go to doctorscrossing.com, my website, and hit the freebee tab at the top of the page.



And on the freebie tab, if you scroll all the way to the end, the time management resource will be right there for you. So, I hope this is helpful and helps you prioritize what you want to do. All right, now back to our lovely guest, Dr. Kimberly Hartzfeld.

Kim, we're getting close to the end here, but I'm curious, as you think back along this arc of change, are there any tips or words of advice that you would give listeners who are a little afraid to make a big move and afraid to make a mistake or lose money, or just be embarrassed if something doesn't work out?

KH: Well, I would say that if you're not happy in what you're doing, then I think it's time for a change. We need to make sure that we are happy in life because life is short, and I don't think we should fear change. I think we should embrace it because you never know what opportunities are on the other side, and it could bring you so much joy and more sleep and just provide that balance or happiness you were looking for.

HF: Did you have any dark nights of the soul when you were in this whole process?

KH: Yeah, of course. Not having any business background, it was very daunting to open up my own practice. The nice thing is you can go online now and you can learn things that are not in your wheelhouse, but it was still quite daunting. I didn't know how to formulate a consent form or in terms of naming my practice, I had to obtain an attorney to make sure that I wasn't infringing on anybody else's name or practice. There were many aspects of starting a business that were new and scary, but there's a lot of information out there and you can get through that.

HF: That reminds me of, this is another quote from Marie Forleo, and she said, "Everything is figureoutable." We can, and I think as long as we don't get stuck on the how, how are we going to do this, we can move forward. These are so many great tips and pearls that you've given us. Are there any last thoughts you'd like to share with our listeners?



KH: I would just say go for your dream. If you're not happy, figure a way out. Search out somebody like you, Heather, somebody that can help you through the process so you can get to a point where you're doing things that you want to do, that you're sleeping at night, that you're enjoying your life. I think life is too short and change should be a good thing.

HF: Well, that is great advice, because we all want to be happy. It sounds cheesy, but it's just so true and fundamental. And I'm really proud of you. So, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. It was great to have you.

KH: Thanks, Heather. I'm grateful you came into my life. I think you provide such a needed service for physicians and I'm very happy to be here today. Thank you so much.

HF: Oh, you're so welcome. Thank you so much for those kind words. All right. Well guys, I hope you've really enjoyed this. I appreciate you listening. And again, if you want that time management tip, just go to www.doctorscrossing.com/timemanagement. And as always, don't forget to carpe that diem, and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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