



EPISODE 137 When Answers Aren't Coming Soon Enough **With guest Dr. Jennifer Randall**

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: www.doctorscrossing.com/episode137

[0:0:00]

JR: “What kind of person am I? What kind of physician am I that leaves their patients during a pandemic? But it was something that ultimately had to be done because at the end of the day, it was affecting my wellbeing mentally and physically.”

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 137. By the time we make the decision that our career situation needs to change, we often want those changes to happen ASAP. We may be very burned out, in an untenable situation, or just so ready for things to be different.

Sometimes change happens quickly and often when we are actively working through a process, such as in coaching, we see things that are happening and the momentum feels good. But what about the times when answers aren't coming soon enough and we can't

www.doctorscrossing.com/episode137



find the signposts leading us in a new direction? Darkness can settle in around us. We may begin to lose hope and feel lost in a dark forest without a compass.

Waiting for answers is not something we are wired to do. Our job is to problem solve and find answers quickly and efficiently. We want to plan and we'll eagerly follow the steps if we know what they are.

If any of this resonates with you, this episode is for you. My special guest today, Dr. Jennifer Randall is an internist with over 10 years of clinical experience who found herself in this situation of wondering why she couldn't figure out a path forward.

She had tried to find some answers to address her significant burnout, but she was coming up dry. This is not where the story ends however. We're going to hear how she found a new direction in teaching and mentoring at a medical school and talk about how she navigated a career change when she was feeling rather lost and discouraged.

Jennifer will be sharing some advice and suggestions for anyone trying to make some changes in their career, but feeling a bit stuck. We'll also be talking about the work she is doing, teaching and mentoring at a local medical school, and how this experience has greatly helped with her burnout. It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome Dr. Jennifer Randall to the podcast. Hey, hey. Hi Jennifer. How are you?

JR: Hi, Heather. Great. Thank you for having me.

HF: I am very excited and I love that you want to talk about this topic because you're certainly not the only one who's experienced this feeling of "I can't figure out what to do and I'm confused and lost and someone show me some steps, please."

JR: Yes, exactly. Thank you. I'm happy to share.

HF: All right, so take us back to the time when you decided to become a doctor. How did all that happen?

JR: Sure. I knew growing up that I wanted to be of service to people in some way. Really have a direct impact on them. And medicine made sense at the time because I was a good student. I excelled academically. I did well in science. So, it really just sort of made sense, so to speak.

And the reason why I chose to become a physician specifically was basically a strong desire to please my family. I can't say it was due to a strong passion of mine, really more about making the family proud.

HF: Yeah. And thank you for sharing that. It's a great distinction because we can decide we really want to be a doctor, or we decide we're going to medical school, and then by default we become a doctor. I think that's such an important distinction because right there we always see that there's a little chink in the brick wall, this structure, because it wasn't really for you.

JR: Exactly. I would say you hit the nail on the head on that one for sure.

HF: Had you thought of doing anything else if you weren't worrying about pleasing anyone but yourself?

JR: Nothing really concrete, because I was pretty hyper-focused on medicine. Some things that came to mind were the arts. I loved the visual arts, but being an artist wouldn't have been part of the plan. It's like maybe psychology, but really I kind of had a feeling medicine was going to be the path regardless.

HF: All right. So, you were doing very well academically. You get into med school, and then what happened? Did you end up really liking it or did you think “Hmm, this is maybe not for me, but I'm going to keep going?” What happened?

JR: Well, I did quite well academically in medical school. I will say it was an adjustment, just getting used to the whole different way of studying. And I had a lot of insomnia and I think I had my first beginnings of feeling some sense of anxiety. I will say I didn't realize this was happening. I mentioned that I love the visual arts drawing, painting, et cetera. And I realized gradually I just totally stopped doing that. This is something that totally give me life and you get caught up in the culture of constantly studying and achieving that I just didn't even think about that anymore amongst other things. So I can't say that I loved it, but I did meet some wonderful people, but I can't say that I loved the experience.

HF: Can you say, thinking back, Jennifer, on a scale of one to 10, how aligned you felt about this path? With 10 being I'm really aligned with becoming a doctor. Zero, not at all.

JR: Well, if you asked me then, I probably would've rated it pretty highly just because I was so laser focused on completing medical school and just really in survival mode. And if you've told me this now, probably more of a three. And the reason why I give it a three is just because of the patient connections. That part I did appreciate.

HF: Now, can you catch us up a little bit connecting the dots on then getting into practice and realizing you had significant burnout?

JR: Yeah. I started at a practice right out of residency. It was a very supportive group. I had a very robust practice, very loyal patient population. And I thought this was it. I'm going to stay here until I retire. And really multiple times throughout the years, I had second thoughts about, “Is this really what I want to do? Can I really picture myself doing this for so many years?” But I would kind of brush that aside eventually, really just attributing

it to stress, maybe had a stressful day. And these second thoughts are just sort of normal.

But I'd say my ninth year of practice during the pandemic, that's when things really started to catch up with me. We all experienced all the fear, the uncertainty, the loss, but really just the practice itself, practicing medicine didn't feel quite right. And beyond that, it was just very overwhelming in terms of the day-to-day practice. And eventually I was developing panic attacks. I never developed panic attacks before. And a few months later I developed shingles. And to me that was a sign that something wasn't right. Maybe I'm not managing my stress well. So, I took my own advice and decided to seek out a therapist that helped me sort of navigate the feelings I was experiencing.

HF: Why do you think you were having the insomnia early on and then the panic attacks?

JR: Yeah, I think my body was trying to tell me something. That something wasn't in alignment. And I really think it was giving me these little messages along the way. And I really didn't pay attention until I got shingles. Even then I sought out a therapist because I thought I just wasn't managing my stress properly. I didn't think, "Oh, there's something more than that."

HF: Why do you think this path wasn't in alignment with who you are?

JR: Well, I think when you choose a path for someone else's happiness, again, I mentioned a big driving factor was to make my family proud. It wasn't something that came within myself. I think if you live your life trying to please others, it's not going to be in alignment with you. It just doesn't work that way. Maybe for some people it works out. I suspect that it does work out for some people, but that wasn't the case for me.

HF: Did you find out whether that's what your family really wanted you to do? Or was that more an assumption that you weren't making?

JR: No, it was not an assumption.

HF: Okay. So there was pressure, it sounds like whether it was spoken or not, there was driving force for this to be a choice for you.

JR: Yeah, I would say strong encouragement.

HF: Strong encouragement. Okay. Okay. I think you made a really excellent point that our inner self is speaking to us in different ways and the body has a lot of wisdom and it was trying to get your attention. And it can start with things just like some anxiety, some insomnia, some second thoughts like you said. And then panic attack just starts getting louder when we aren't really listening. But then you went to see a therapist. And then what happened next?

JR: Yeah, I saw the therapist again, thinking it was more to manage my stress. What I didn't expect was the realization that I really didn't want to practice medicine anymore. That my heart really wasn't in it. And so, really a big bulk of the therapy involved really learning to accept this. Because I had a really difficult time accepting that was the case. We all go through all this time and effort to become a physician and practice, and that was difficult. But mostly was the shame that I felt as a result. Really what kind of person am I? What kind of physician am I that leaves their patients during a pandemic? But it was something that ultimately had to be done because at the end of the day, it was affecting my wellbeing mentally and physically.

HF: Then the cat in some respects was out of the bag. This truth was out. You couldn't put it back in the bag. You had to deal with it, and there was shame connected to it. So, how were you able to work with this new realization that this was not what I really wanted to do and I put all this time and effort and money into it?

JR: Yeah. I will say my time with my therapist was really helpful with that. I won't get into that in too much detail, but that was very helpful. But really trying to figure out, "Okay, well, what's next? If I'm not going to practice medicine, what am I going to do next?" I made it really my mission to figure it out. So I did a deep dive into Google, did a whole bunch of research, read a bunch of books about people who made career changes, blogs, podcasts, TED talks. I found out everything I possibly could.

One of the things in my Google searches was your blog and your podcasts. And really, it was such a lifeline for me because I felt so isolated in this process. And your podcast really gave me a lot of validation and hope that not only was I not alone in this, but there was hope that there could be a different pathway that I could figure this out. And that's around the time when I reached out to you, I was really burned out, but also really kind of stuck in terms of what the next steps were.

HF: Yeah. I remember when we coached for about four months, and I could tell you had this huge heart and it was really causing a lot of internal conflict to think about leaving your patients, leaving this practice and being a physician and you're a deep feeler, you have a huge heart. And it can be a grieving process too, to make this realization. And it's a loss, but there's no body, there's no funeral, there's no some official way to process the grief. And so, we started coaching and then what happened?

JR: Yeah, the coaching, I was so thrilled to be a part of your coaching program. I really enjoyed the initial process of really exploring my values and my characteristics of an ideal work situation. The Enneagram, all this stuff was really interesting and fascinating. And then came time to write a vision statement about my ideal work situation. And I wrote two of them and I really despise both of them to be honest. I just thought, "Oh, I don't like any of these ideas that I came up with."

And this is supposed to be best case scenario. And so, it was kind of a bit of a shock, but also I was so deeply disappointed and discouraged, not in you, but in me. In the best

case scenario, I couldn't think of anything that I connected with that I liked, that resonated. So I really thought, "Okay, something wrong with me is finding some level of career satisfaction. Maybe it's just not in the cards for me. And maybe that's just the way it is." I don't know. I think in some ways I felt like a failure. And so, at that time, I decided, "Okay, I'm going to put a pause on coaching for now because it just wasn't really going where I wanted to go."

HF: Yeah. And I really appreciate you sharing this because lots of different things can happen when we do coaching or start on a process. I've seen people find jobs in three months. Different people find avenues and move forward and apply. But then there are also people I've had will take a year off. I took a couple years off when I sold my practice. I remember thinking concretely, "I feel too burned out." I know that sounds crazy, a dermatologist feeling burned out, but I was.

JR: Not at all.

HF: I said "If I try to figure out what I'm going to do next, I'm afraid I'm going to make a mistake. So I'm not going to try to figure it out." I did buy that book "What Color Is Your Parachute?" I read one page and then I spent the next two years doing just following things that interested me. So, this is why I really want to bring this out on the podcast. Everyone has a different path, but we want to honor what's happening to you because there's often a bigger wisdom that's guiding us, but it's hard to see it and know it at the time.

When you felt like you said a bit of a failure because you didn't find the direction, how did you deal with those feelings? And then that's not where it ended. So, then how did you come out of them?

JR: Yeah, really through some inner work. I participated in this really great mindfulness conference. Really coming to the realization that I was so deeply unhappy and burned

out that I just felt like I was in this dark fog. I couldn't see beyond that staying in the same clinical situation that I was in. And so, really just understanding that I couldn't envision an ideal future if I felt so stuck where I was. So, ultimately I had to really make that decision to step back and resign from my position, which is what I did.

HF: And you give yourself space. If we think about if someone is married and then they get divorced, some people get married right away, but the more common thing is to give yourself time to process what has happened. And that can often require doing less and not going out and dating a bunch of people. But for some reason we feel like we have to go from one job to another job. And that there's not this requisite period, some time as processing not just what you experienced in your career, but there may have been things that have happened in your personal life or even in your childhood that because you've been so busy achieving goals, haven't really ever been dealt with. Do you feel that there were other things that you were also processing besides the career situation?

JR: That was a big one. I have a young family, so that was certainly something that I was thinking about and dealing with virtual school and all of that at the time. But your comment about feeling like you have to jump from one job to another right away, I really did put that pressure on myself because I thought that's what you're supposed to do.

HF: And did you find that your ability to connect with your own inner voice was changing during this period?

JR: Oh, absolutely. I think it took me over a year to come to the conclusion that my heart wasn't in medicine and when I actually ultimately resigned, but that took a lot of inner work really listening to myself and just really honoring that inner voice. And really what helped to after I resigned was just reconnecting with the things that I love, that I neglected, especially starting in medical school. So, I started taking art classes again and reading books for pleasure, exercising regularly, getting proper sleep, being more

present with my family. And it opened up to exploring other avenues like gardening. Who would've thought? I never thought I'd get into gardening.

HF: Right. You had made the point earlier, Jennifer, that when you started medical training, you're giving up these things that had been hobbies and interests and you were artistic, but you had to sort of let go of that. And so, we lose parts of ourselves and it sounds like you're reclaiming them. So, in a minute, I want to go and talk about what you're doing now and how you got into that. But first I want to take a short break and then we'll be right back.

Hello my dear listeners. I just wanted to thank you so much for being a listener of this podcast and letting me know how much it's helpful for you and leaving reviews and ratings. This is so great, and I am very, very grateful.

I want to give another little shout out to those of you sharing the podcast with other people, encourage you to share this podcast and any others with people you know that it could be helpful for. I want to double, triple, quadruple the listeners that we have, and you're helping me so much by sharing it. So thank you so much. We're coming back right now with Dr. Jennifer Randall, and we're going to talk about where she went next.

So, you described this process and I love this, of coming back to yourself and doing things that you love and things that feed your heart. And then where did that lead you?

JR: Yeah, again, just feeling more whole in general. And I think just feeling more whole and healed just made me more open-minded to whatever came my way. So, six months after I resigned, I was informed of a teaching position at a local medical school by a former colleague. And really it would involve teaching small groups. I think many of us remember that experience. And initially, I was a little hesitant because I thought, well, I was kind of wounded by medicine, my relationship with medicine was a bit strained, so to speak.

But ultimately I decided to apply for the job because really looking back, I thought about how much I wanted to be a teacher as a kid. And anyway, I remember during my residency, really enjoying teaching medical students. So I thought, "All right, well, I'll give it a try. If I'm qualified to teach anything, it's medicine, just given my experience." So I applied and got the job.

HF: And can you tell us a little bit about what you're teaching?

JR: Sure. I basically started with clinical skills. So, it's interesting because you really realize just how many skills we possess as physicians. But really early on, you're teaching students how to take a history, just basic physical exam skills and later you progress to developing a differential and using clinical reasoning and how to build rapport with your patients, how to have empathy. So, it really goes into that in terms of the actual content.

HF: You had mentioned I know when we were speaking earlier too, that this has been healing for you and healing in terms of your burnout and your relationship to medicine. Can you speak a little more about that?

JR: Sure. I mentioned my appreciation of my clinical skills. That in of itself was really powerful to see just how incredible we are as physicians, what we're capable of, but really working with the students specifically. They're such a bright, engaged, motivated group of people. And so, just witnessing their growth in and of itself is very rewarding. And I found very healing.

Ultimately, I feel like I'm passing the torch in a lot of ways in terms of my skills. I don't know if I plan to resume clinical medicine. So as of now, it feels really good to pass on my skills to the next generation of doctors. I'll digress a little bit. I made this drawing of what I call my soul tree when I was going through some of my burnout. And really, it starts with a tear. My tears. It's basically a seed that leads to a tree, and this tree is bearing fruit. And I just feel like the fruit is what I'm passing on to these students. That to me

was very healing in a lot of ways. The connections I had with my students. I mentioned that my relationships with my patients in my clinical days were really meaningful. And now I get to have that kind of close relationship with my students, which is really, really, really wonderful. I also get to mentor them, which has also been really very, very important to my healing.

HF: I remember that drawing, and I'm going to send it out in the email that announces your podcast. I think it's so beautiful and I love the metaphor of the tears and honoring that your truth led to this fruit and sharing of abundance and knowledge with others. And it doesn't have to be that you necessarily want to be a practicing physician anymore to share this gift and heart that you have.

JR: Right, right. Yeah, it's been beautiful to use my skills in a different way that's more in alignment with who I am.

HF: So your journey is really a journey of going. You went away from yourself and then this is your journey back to yourself. And is it okay if we mention your Enneagram type?

JR: Sure.

HF: Do you want to talk about your top type? The first one, the highest, your primary type?

JR: Well, I was tied between two and nine. Between helper and peacemaker, I suppose if I had to choose one the helper would go over the peacemaker.

HF: Yeah. And they're very people oriented types. And one thing about the type nine in particular, and the type two does this too, is they tend to reference other people's needs and wants. And to do that you have to diminish your own or quiet them. So, it's not unusual for both of these types to go in a direction that isn't really in alignment with them. It can happen to any type, but then it can take a while to turn that volume up of

the inner self and start hearing it again because that muscle has gotten weak. Because you had to kind of not exercise it for a while and then that's why it could happen where you may not know what you want, you may need a period of coming back to yourself before that volume is loud enough so it can really speak to you.

JR: Yeah, I would say I resonate with all of that.

HF: This is great. I love that you're sharing this direction that you've gone into. That doesn't have to be the complete end or be all of where you're going, but it's right for now. If someone was interested in doing this type of role of teaching in a medical school, can you talk for a minute about the qualifications and how they might get started?

JR: Yeah, so qualifications are, I would say, fairly relaxed in the sense that you don't need an active license to do this. And you do need to be board eligible, but not necessarily board certified. So, what's interesting is that I see a whole gamut of people that do this. So you have residents that do this and you also have people that are currently practicing medicine and then you have retired physicians. So, it really runs a gamut of different types of levels of experience. In terms of how to get into it, I got into it through word of mouth, but really I think if you reach out to your local medical school and see how you can be of help, I know at least at the time that I was applying for it, I know there was a need for these type types of facilitators in other medical schools.

HF: And I assume this is usually part-time.

JR: Yeah, I would say it's part-time. I think it lends itself well to either strictly part-time work or if you are working full-time and you want to do this as sort of a side gig. Really, I think it lends itself well to that. The scheduling is very flexible in that regard.

HF: Can you share a little bit about compensation?

JR: Yeah, I would say it's roughly about a hundred dollars per hour.

HF: Excellent. So, in the last few minutes that we have, what advice might you give someone who isn't able yet to really hear the truth, but the truth is there?

JR: That's a really good question. I think it's easier said than done, but there's a lot of letting go that has to happen with that. Don't feel like you have to do it alone necessarily. These kinds of things are hard to process on your own. In my case, it was therapy that helped a lot. For some people it's coaching, although you did provide a lot of support in our coaching, which I really appreciated. Keeping your family, your friends. My family and friends were so helpful to help me navigate through this.

But really, I think when you talk about trying to really listen to your voice, don't try so hard to figure it out. That's really what got me. I couldn't figure it out. So I tried to work harder to figure it out and that got me so frustrated. And then you just amplify those efforts and you just get caught in this cycle. So really trying to take a step back, trying to let go. I know it's easier said than done and that's when seeking out support from others is helpful. And really try to reconnect with yourself if that's relevant to you. And if you don't know how to do that or what your old passions or hobbies were, just think about what you loved as a kid. That's what helped me.

HF: That is brilliant advice. I love what you said about it can be a lot of letting go. If we sometimes are striving and struggling too hard, it can be a sign that the universe is just wanting us to step back and be still or let things be and trust that we can live this question. The answers are coming, but it's more like our winter when things are happening underneath the surface and spring is coming, but spring isn't here in January. We need to let the rhythms of a higher intelligence, so to speak, work through us and we can't push it. So, that was beautiful. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing your journey. I can't thank you enough.



JR: Oh, you're very welcome. It really is my pleasure. Truly.

HF: Well, wonderful. Keep us posted on what you're doing because I think more is coming and thank you again, Jennifer.

JR: Thank you so much, Heather. Take care.

HF: You're very welcome. Well, my dear listeners, thank you for listening. I always appreciate you being here more than you know. And if you are needing some encouragement to listen to a truth that's hard to hear, I hope this podcast has helped you because it can be painful sometimes to hear the truth, but it is the way to be in alignment with yourself, finding what's right for you and carpeing that diem. So thanks again, I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

You've been listening to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you've enjoyed what you've heard, I'd love it if you'd take a moment to rate and review this podcast and hit the subscribe button below so you don't miss an episode. If you'd like some additional resources, head on over to my website at doctorscrossing.com and check out the free resources tab. You can also go to doctorscrossing.com/free-resources. And if you want to find more podcast episodes, you can also find them on the website under the podcast tab. And I hope to see you back in the next episode. Bye for now.

[00:30:32]

Podcast details

END OF TRANSCRIPT