

24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle



**FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT**

## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

**Michael:** Well, hey everyone and welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. So happy to have you here with us today, and welcome back to my co-host, Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma, how are you?

**Arpita:** I am good. How are you doing, Michael Hersh?

**Michael:** I am doing great and excited to have our guest on today. So before we jump into telling you about who's here with us today, you know, one thing that our listeners may have noticed is that at the end of each episode, we take a moment to tell them that coaching is not a substitute for therapy, and I think that this is something that comes up in a lot of discussions in the physician community. I know I've seen a lot of it on social media kind of discussions between therapy and coaching. Do you have thoughts about this Arpita? What have you seen?

**Arpita:** Yeah, I think there is definitely an area for both and even including mentoring, quite frankly, therapy, coaching, mentoring, they're all three different areas. And there's definitely areas of overlap specifically also with therapy versus coaching. And so being able to kind of distinguish when it's most beneficial and efficacious for somebody to undergo therapy versus when they should maybe have more of a benefit from coaching versus maybe both. Also, there's areas of overlap between the two. So I'm super excited to welcome our guest today, Dr. Priya Wagle. She is a colleague and friend who has, quite frankly, has, partaken in both and has the experience and knowledge to be able to speak about that. And so Dr. Wagle welcome today. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Priya:** Thanks guys. It's so nice to be with you both. I'm a practicing otolaryngologist for the past 20 years and I got certified in life and wellness coaching in 2021. I have my own coaching business for private clients and I also contract with a another coaching company for coaching with women physicians.

**Michael:** That's great. And you kind of have had some experiences with both therapy and coaching. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about what your experience was and how you kind of have used both in your life?

**Priya:** Sure. First of all, I wanna say to you guys, thank you for having this topic on your show, because I think it's really important, and I think that there's still, despite everybody's efforts, a stigma associated with mental illness and you know, going to see a therapist or a psychiatrist, or sometimes even a coach. But I came to this through my new journey after and during my divorce process. I have suffered from depression and anxiety for a good part of my life and have had therapy with several different therapists, psychiatrists, non psychiatrists and then sort of got to the point where I didn't feel that it was enough for me in terms of what my goals were. And I had also reached a certain level of mental health where I felt that when I found coaching it sparked something in me that perhaps therapy hadn't.

**Arpita:** So I guess for our listeners, if you were speaking to somebody who had really never heard about coaching or what it is, how would you differentiate therapy from coaching?

**Priya:** Sure. Coaching is about being intentional with your thoughts, goals, desires, feelings, relationships, in a forward thinking manner. You can, you know, work on your past, of course, in coaching with your coach. But in general I would say that the focus is more forward.

## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

**Arpita:** Yeah. And I think one of the ways that I like to describe it when people ask me is it's future focused thinking, right? So this is where we are now. We're performing at our baseline level of function, but we're not quite reaching our fullest potential. We're not optimizing or maximizing how we can show up each day. And so with the power of coaching, it's really having somebody kind of giving you other perspectives, other maybe options to consider for situations that you might be in, because when we're in our own brain of how things are, it's really hard to see other perspectives. And so a lot of times I think working with a coach is great because it allows us to see perspectives that they're giving to us that we may not have once considered. And then how would you define that difference with therapy?

**Priya:** Right. It's not that, you know, I think therapists can do that too. I think they are there to provide you with a, you know, an objective perspective, if you will. But, you know, you sort of need therapy to get to a point where you can use coaching. I think before I found coaching, when I was really suffering in my depression and with my anxiety, which I still, you know, I still manage. It's not that I'm completely out of that. It's treated and I live with it, but it's, you know, I'm not dysfunctional from it. And I think that therapists can really help you get from a dysfunctional level to a functional level. It's a basic sort of state to get to and before you get to that state of function, I don't know that a coach is you know, sometimes will say to clients, listen, I don't know that you are ready for this yet. And I would refer you to say a therapist or a psychiatrist or somebody who can get you, get to that functional level because I think you do need, that's my opinion. I think you do need to get to a certain level of function before you can avail yourself of what coaches have to offer.

**Michael:** And so you kind of had had your own journey where you, you mentioned that you were going through your divorce and that kind of led you to therapy. So at what point, did you find that you had kind of gotten beyond that basic level of functioning, that you were looking for something more? How might somebody recognize that for themselves and how did you recognize it for you?

**Priya:** That's a really good question, Michael. I mean, it's it is an evolution. It definitely is an evolution. And I know, I wanna point out that I was in therapy even before my divorce. And, you know, that was a sort of a situational depression, but I had suffered from depression just because, you know, before. And I wanna say that specifically for people who are listening, who are, you know maybe not so comfortable with the idea of being depressed or anxious and, and to give them permission to admit it to themselves. You don't need an excuse to be depressed or anxious. It happens to people. That's number one. You know, you feel yourself, at least this is what happened for me, I can speak for myself, is you feel yourself getting better. And sort of having more hope maybe for the future and becoming more functional and not suffering from all those symptoms of depression. And then I remember sitting in therapy sessions going, okay, so what do I do now? You know, in my head, what do I do with that? Okay, so that's what my past is about and this is why this happened, but now where do I go?

**Arpita:** Exactly. Yeah. Now what? And I think that's a, it's a good point. It's almost like you will know, like when you're not able to perform your day-to-day activities in a way, or you're, you're not at your baseline. That's where we do turn to the assistance and the help and the guidance of the therapists and psychiatrists to help us get there. And that may or may not include medication therapy, or it might just be C B T in a sense or other behavioral or modification therapies. But when it gets to the point where you are performing fine, but you're really just feeling like you're stuck in the now and not reaching your full potential. I think that's when we start to recognize, and so just to like give an example, I think for me what I realized is how I was showing

## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

up. I am able to perform, get the things done, manage the household, manage the kids, manage the business. But I was showing up in a way that was so angry, not productive. Not happy. Not positive, and I didn't like it. I was like, you know, I'm excelling in all these other areas to the outside world and in my inside world, I don't like the way I am showing up. I don't like why I'm always angry or resentful or whatever it is, and I couldn't figure out why that was happening. So, you know, I'm able to manage my day-to-day, but I'm not performing in a way that really I was proud of, that I felt like I could do better in. And that's when I said, you know what? Let me consider this cuz I, I've tried everything. You know, I don't understand what I don't. And we talked about this, Michael, at a different one, we don't know what we don't know, right? We are just kind of living in our day-to-day routine and we're not able to see outside of that sometimes. And that's where the help of the coach is to help you recognize that there is more and you are capable of more. And I'm gonna help you see what you wanna do and how you're gonna get there.

**Priya:** Absolutely. The way I saw my, so my mental construct of my struggle at that point where I was sort of emerging from therapy was that I was underneath my life. It was like this mountain on top of me. And coaching really helped me to, to feel on top of it. So you know, that life wasn't happening to me. That I was leading my life, as you said, the word you used was intentional and to optimize the experience you have of your life. I think that that is what coaching does.

**Michael:** Yeah. And there's some discussions in, again, you know, when we see these discussions in social media communities amongst physicians talking about the qualifications of physician coaches versus therapists versus psychiatrists, what's your insight here?

**Priya:** I, you know, my uncle's a psychiatrist. I have immense respect for people in the you know, the psychotherapeutic space. Of course, I would never put myself forward as somebody who would be an equivalent of that or to replace a therapist or a psychiatrist. I think we do fulfill a very specific function as physician coaches and you know, my clients are physicians and I have gone through specifically what they are going through and have managed my mind in a way now and I'm continuing of course, it's, I think it's a journey. I don't think it ever ends. But I think I'm in a unique position to take somebody through that process.

**Arpita:** Yeah, I think as physician coaches, we have the beauty, the kind of the unique ability to be able to say, Hey, I mean, we do this when we see our patients, right? When we, we are concerned, or we have this little red flag that I think this patient has anxiety, depression, whatever it is, we will refer them out to whoever we feel is gonna be able to best serve them in that. And so that's where I feel like as physician coaches, we have this ability to be able to decipher, this is somebody who I am comfortable coaching, and this is somebody who needs a little bit of additional support. And we're gonna send them that way too. And maybe they'll come back. Maybe we can do it both at the same time. Each case is very unique and individual. And that's what we have to look at and assess as part of our our skill. You spoke a little bit about the stigma or somebody, one of you guys spoke a little bit about the stigma regarding therapy and coaching. Talk a little bit about that. Like were you fearful even when you began your journey with coaching? What people would think and how did you overcome that?

**Priya:** Well, it wasn't when I began my, my journey with coaching, it was when I was in therapy, you know, it was before coaching and I think actually, meeting the community of physician coaches that I've met has helped me destigmatize it for myself and be more open to wanting to help destigmatize it for others because I see how

## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

much suffering is around, you know, and how much people need help. And you know I guess I did have some shame associated with it to the point where I'd, you know, I wouldn't tell people what medication I was on, you know, if I went to a doctor visit, because you know, it's a position you're supposed to be in control. You're supposed to know everything and not have weakness. You know, I do think as physicians that were held to a certain standard that one could argue is perhaps not fair. You know, we are human beings and we suffer just like everybody else. And this is a medical problem, you know? I tell my patients all the time, you treat your hypertension right? You know, well the cortisol is streaming through your body and increasing your blood pressure. And this is just a medicine to help you with that.

**Michael:** I mean, I think the key here is that mental health is pervasive, right? It, touches every aspect of every life, and physicians are not immune to that. And so an opportunity to destigmatize this, to begin the discussions, to talk about it, and you both so eloquently have pointed out that we as physicians, we address the mental health of our patients day in and day out, and that is regardless of medical subspecialty, right? As Arpita as a pediatrician, Priya as an otolaryngologist, I deal with mental health issues in the realm of gastroenterology, day in and day out because you can't separate these issues from the human element, right? It, it is part of who we are. And so I think it's so essential that we are here talking about these issues, normalizing it and making it so that physicians know that all of this stuff is normal and that we can't ignore it. That there's so much going on in healthcare right now that mental health is so involved with. That it's time that we do spend some time talking about it and addressing these issues and so I'm so glad, Priya, that you're here today to talk through this and your own experiences. So I, are there key points that you would want our listeners to take away in kind of their quest to kind of figure things out for themselves?

**Priya:** Yeah. And so a couple points that I wanted to bring up that I haven't brought up yet is that coaching introduced me to the idea that I have a relationship with myself. And I did not know that. And so I had a default relationship with myself. Like we talk about intentional thinking versus default thinking. So I just had this default relationship with myself when I was really mean to myself. And that's one of the things that I think is so pivotal to discover, that once you discover that the power you have to change your experience on this earth is just, you know, unlimited. That's number one.

Number two, give yourself a break. I really just remember before I found coaching and and this community, how hard I was on myself and how now in coaching other physicians, how hard we tend to be on ourselves. And I think that that is the culture that we inherit when we go through medical school and residency and training. And it doesn't need to be that way. You can still achieve, you can still be the best you can be and do it with love for yourself.

**Arpita:** Yeah, I mean, I think when you said that, it made me go back to the five year old self, like, would you treat or speak to your five year old version of yourself the way you do as an adult? Right? Because again, it goes back also to this, the, we've talked a little bit about the stigma around it that, you know, I don't want to, I'm gonna be fearful of what other people are gonna think. Why does it matter? Right? Why can't we just be okay with what we need to do for ourselves? We don't need to worry about why other people need services or what people might think if we need services. The point is, is that once you recognize that there is a need for yourself and you're able to act on that for your own sake, you're living with your own intention for what you wanna do, right? And a lot of this is just, again, having the awareness. We think that people need to get coaching because they can't get their act together. Like who needs a life coach? You know, I was, I was one of



## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

those, like, what is this doing? The purpose is, again, we are not aware of what we're not aware of. So when we can start to recognize we got to a point that something needs to change. Yeah. Let me consider this.

Everybody's gonna be on their own journey, on their own path for when they're gonna be ready for it. But when you do, if you do, I would say you should, but when you do get there, it's completely transformational. Right? It has nothing to do with, yeah, it has nothing, I mean, it might have a little bit to do with self-confidence or whatever. Like for me, the biggest thing was why would anybody need a coach? I have got my shit together. I've got my act together. I don't have self-confidence issues, so it really wasn't making sense to me. Why do I need a coach? And that's where kind of the magic is, where you don't even know what you don't know. And that's what that coach helps you see.

**Priya:** So I also think as physicians we tend to just do what we're told. A lot of the time that, you know, we have this idea of excellence that we have to get to, and we do it by performing for others in a way that, you know, may be really uncomfortable to us. We put aside our fatigue, we put aside our hunger, we put aside our feelings and we get told that at a very young age, when we start our residency or even in medical school, put aside your feelings. You need to be objective. It'll keep you from you know, taking care of that patient. But we're never taught how to take care of ourselves after the fact. You know, so we end up as these shells of human beings. That's why we have such a problem with burnout now, I think. But it doesn't need to be that way. You know, you can look at the culture that is sort of presented in front of you and decide for yourself if you wanna do that.

**Michael:** That's an incredible message of hope, right? Because it doesn't have to be that way. And I think the key takeaway from this is that there are so many options for everyone and we are here speaking largely to physicians. There are so many options cuz your life doesn't have to look that way anymore. Right? And there are therapists and there are mentors and there are physician coaches and lots of other different ways in communities for you to shift the current narrative to something that you actually want it to look like. And again, Priya, your message is so filled with hope and I, just appreciate it so much.

**Priya:** Thank you. And you know that it's genuine because it comes from what I went through and I remember feeling stuck and feeling like, God, you know, is this all there is? But the thing is, it's, you know, this is my life. It's, it's nobody else's life. So I should be able to decide what I wanna do with it and how I wanna think and feel and act through it.

**Arpita:** Beautiful. So touching. So beautiful. Well, I am so grateful that we were able to talk to you today about this, Priya, tell our audience how they could find you and reach out to you if they're interested in working with you.

**Priya:** Sure. They can go to my website, which is [priyawaglemd.com](http://priyawaglemd.com) and thank you guys for bringing me on. This has been so great. I really appreciate it.

**Michael:** Absolutely, and for our listeners, we'll have all of Dr. Wagle's information in our show notes so that you can reach out to her. And again, Priya, so glad to have you here today. You know, we are, are obviously all friends outside of, of this and and it's just so great to get to chat with you and make sure that everybody else gets to know how amazing you are too.

## 24. It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: The Benefits of Therapy vs Coaching - with Dr. Priya Wagle

**Priya:** And congrats on the podcast guys. This is great.

**Arpita:** Thank you.

**Michael:** Thank you so much. And thank all of you for listening, and we look forward to seeing you on the next episode of Doctors Living Deliberately.

**Arpita:** Take care.

**Michael:** Bye.