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## [Season 1: Episode 10: The Art of Slowing Down](#)

Welcome to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness, a podcast to help Vanderbilt faculty and staff with their healthiest lives.

MB: Hello, everyone! Welcome to the Healthier You podcast. I am Megan Bergfeld, one of the clinical counselors in Work/Life Connections-EAP here at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. I am thrilled to be with you again this month with a very special guest who is a pediatric intensivist, a clinical ethicist, and the founder of Burning Bright MD where she offers life coaching to women physicians. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Jessica Turnbull.

JT: Awe, thank you for having me.

MB: Thank you so much for coming. I appreciate it. We are approaching the end of summer. In fact, school is largely back in session in our area, and many folks know summer as vacation season. It is a time of leisure, relaxation, easier schedules with the kids, et cetera. So, today, we are going to talk about the value of leisure. Why, particularly in healthcare, it is so valuable to slow down, and how we can carry that slower summer vibe with us throughout the year. So, Jessie, when we were considering this topic, your name shot to the top of our lists of potential guests because you have spoken to this idea of slowing down in some of your Burning Bright MD blog entries. Can you start by giving me just some general background on your relationship with leisure throughout your career?

JT: So, I was marinating on this topic literally this morning, when I knew we were going to have this conversation. The idea of leisure in academic medicine this time of year is odd, and I hadn't thought about this until this morning. Because we have all of these new residents, and we have all of these new fellows, and we have a lot of new attendings starting, too, because they have just graduated their training, and the energy around all of those new people is very go, go, go. We want to do all the things.

We want to be the best colleagues. We want to be the best teachers. We want to be the best members of our community in the hospital. And so, while summer is a time of leisure, maybe we miss that in academic medicine during the later part of summer anyway because we have all that extra energy running around. I think that extra energy has a place, but then where it becomes interesting is when that initial energy wears off because inevitably it does. Inevitably the newness wears off, and then everybody is just kind of left in the day-to-day of doing their jobs and taking care of patients and doing the administrative work. And, I also think, when you are young in your career you just have a lot of that energy anyway. So, my relationship with leisure has changed a lot, especially in the last few years, and let's be honest especially since COVID. I think COVID changed everybody's relationship to leisure because we were just forced to stop. You know? And then we kind of realized we liked stopping, and we liked having that break. We liked having the world just kind of stop around us, even though it had stopped for a horrible reason. It gave us this forced leisure that then when we started coming back to work, we were like, "Wait a minute, I want the good things of that time back," but then we were going back into a work environment that hadn't quite adjusted to people knowing that having that leisure was good. So, I love that now, a couple of years out of the pandemic, you're taking the time to look at the summer and be like let's talk about leisure in this setting again.

Because as I have gotten older, and then after we had the forced stop during COVID, I have recognized that the energy that I burn when I am going, going, going, is a very costly energy. The "move onto the next thing, check off all the to do list, answer all the emails, teach all the things" - it's an energy that just feels so expensive to burn. You go home, you sit on the couch, you order something from Uber Eats because you don't have the energy to cook. You binge watch something and then you don't go to bed when you should because you feel the need to have some sort of pleasure in your life so you binge watch something until way past your appropriate bedtime, and then you are just stuck in that cycle of that very expensive energy that you're burning.

So, being able to recognize, "oh this time is slower, what can I take from this time that is slower going into the rest of my life?" I have learned that just so deeply over the past few years where now I deliberately take breaks as opposed to giving myself the pep talk of, "You can do anything for another day. You can do anything for another week." You know? It's just like no, it's time to stop now. Because then the energy that I have the next day is a much less expensive energy to burn. It comes from a place of abundance as opposed to a place of scarcity. And I think, that's what I have learned over the years. That there is a time to burn expensive energy and do all the things and get all the things done, but at some point, we need to recognize when that way of using our energy isn't serving us anymore and we need to just say, "I'm not less than. I'm not a wimp." If I say, "no, no I'm going to bed at a reasonable hour, no I'm not going to get my inbox to zero, like I'm going to shut down the laptop and I'm going to go home for the day." The reason the summer is so good for that is because even in the hospital, things are naturally slower, and so if you've got kids at home, and if you've got family at home, you've got a little bit of a different schedule and what not there, and then in the hospital we kind of have the same. It's like this lovely opportunity to be like, "OK, everybody, what have you not been doing for the past couple of months and what do you maybe not have to pick back up as the fall comes along?"

MB: I love that. I am sitting here thinking you might be looking into my home, with the Uber Eats and the Netflix thing. I was like, "Oh, she's talking about me."

JT: Yeah, well. You know the reason we talk about it is it's so darn common and then we think we are the only ones who are like the screw ups who can't have a balanced dinner on the table at you know 5:45, 6:00 and then you know obviously, everybody else is getting their kids to bed at a reasonable hour

and they are in their totally clean pajamas and there is absolutely no chaos. I think the more that we can be like, no, no, no the reason I'm throwing that out is because I do that, and other people do that. I think it just normalizes it. That it's like yeah no, we could all use some more time. And we are trying to get leisure and we're trying to get time with those shortcuts. And obviously, those shortcuts are very effective because Uber Eats is not going bankrupt any time soon, nor is Netflix as far as I know. Right? So, it's like we're using those things to get some leisure time, but then it's cool, what else can we cut back so then we could do deeper leisure things, as opposed to 'order-it-on-an-app' leisure things.

MB: Yeah, I think so for sure. This is true for everyone. Right? I'm curious why you think this would be particularly valuable in healthcare?

JT: I think if you're in healthcare you're naturally an empathic person with high emotional intelligence. Like, I don't think I'm blowing any doors off by making that statement. Right? I think you go into medicine because you want to help people. You go into medicine because you are on some level a people person. People who know me that are listening to this are like, "Yeah, no, you make it known that you're a raging introvert."

MB: Yeah.

JT: But I still like people, they're amazing. I think, when you are in medicine, you're so used to putting your energy outward toward others. It makes it so that you're left drained at the end of the day. So, it not only means that you don't have energy for yourself, it means that you don't have energy for your family. You don't have energy for your loved ones. And then, at some point, you stop running out of energy for your patients and their families, and your colleagues, which is a big problem because we went into healthcare to take care of patients and families, and work with cool people. So, if we're constantly putting out energy in healthcare and we don't take the time to refurbish that energy, all of a sudden, the thing that we loved just becomes the thing that we loathe. And that's awful. That's not a good way to live. Right? And there's so much good in healthcare. As salty as we can all get about things in healthcare that we cannot control, gosh let's be honest, there's so much good in it. So, if we are so drained of our energy where we can't even see the amazingness that happens around us every single day, ah that's rotten. That's rotten for everybody involved. You know.

MB: For sure. For sure. I'm just resonating. I'm thinking about all the stuff that you said. Because, I can look over my career and see how at different times I've taken more time for myself or others, and how that impacted not only my work, but my family, and my own self. My own person. So, then the big question I guess, is if we can see the value of leisure and slowing down, particularly in a healthcare setting or in this profession, how do we carry the slower summer vibe through the rest of the year, into fall with the crazy school schedules and holidays, and la la?

JT: Yeah.

MB: How do we do that?

JT: Yeah, so I think one of the amazing things about summer is that we can just take our cues from what is happening outside of our door and outside of our windows. So, it's like that the light lasts a little bit later and that makes you kind of want to slow down and maybe hangout outside. Or, you can take a walk a little bit later or something like that. Those are habits that we cultivate when it is really, really easy to cultivate those habits. It's warm out. It's light out. It's easy to take an afternoon stroll when you get home from work or something like that and it feels nice. The key is to remember how nice that habit

is when it starts to get a little bit colder, when it starts to get a little bit darker, and say you know I really, really loved this so how can I make it work as the season is changing. So, I think that's the first thing, just kind of taking our cues from what is happening out in the world as the seasons change.

My other thing is one of the nice things about summer, at Children's anyway, I don't know if this is the same over at the adult hospital, but we have less meetings in the summer. Some of our educational curricula just take a hiatus, grand rounds take a little bit of a hiatus. We have clinician educator track that we can take, but there's just kind of less to do. There are less meetings. A lot of meetings get canceled the day before because so many people are on vacation. So, you know, the roster is going to be really low, so they just cancel the meeting. To then take that into the fall and be like, okay what meetings can I get rid of? Like what meetings can actually be emails? I think people are scared to ask that question because they don't want to look like they are not pulling their weight, or they don't want to look like they're lazy, or they don't want to look like they just want to work from home and never come in. But, if we're talking about people's sanity and time, there are probably a lot of meetings that could be emails. Or, a lot of meetings that could run more efficiently with a little bit of work up front. And so, saying, "Man, that time over the summer where we didn't have a lot of meetings was really, really nice. What can we do as a group or what can I do as an individual to cut back on the amount of time that I'm working on somebody else's project in a meeting?" I think that really speaks to looking at what your values are in the summer and how they can carry on because if in the summer you're like, "Man I really, really miss going to noon conference," even though our residents still have noon conference, but this is just an example off the top of my head. "Man, I really, really miss going to that lecture because it doesn't happen in the summer." Well then that means you should really prioritize going to that lecture when it happens and maybe move something else off of your plate that you don't value as much. We can take the opportunity to kind of unpack our plate based on what we have learned from what we value when the months are a little bit lighter.

MB: Yeah. You had a blog entry, it's been months ago now, that was titled "How to Quit" and it scared me at first because I wasn't sure what you were doing. I was like, "Where is she going, what's happening?" But I love that you broke down kind of a triage system if you will, how to prioritize, what to trim. There are certain things that we are here to do. We're paid to do them. It's what our job is. But then there are other things that we say yes to that we may or may not really need to say yes to, or could trim. And that's just something I have tried to adapt or adopt into my own day to day. And, I think you're right, in the summer it is easier to do that when I'm like, "Hey, my kids aren't in school. I'm planning a vacation. I'm, it's just hot and I don't move as fast...", you know whatever the case may be, but keeping that up, I think throughout the year, keeping that mindset is tricky for people.

JT: Yeah, yeah. I think one of the things we get into in healthcare is that everything becomes our problem. One of the reasons we go into healthcare is because we like fixing problems. We are problem fixers. So, that quite quickly morphs into everything is my responsibility and everything is my problem. Maybe, but the reality is a lot of things that we take on could either probably be done better by somebody else, or don't actually need to be done anyway. But the reason they are being done is because we're driving ourselves crazy trying to get them done. And, it's all toward chasing this gold star that we've been trained to chase since childhood, when the reality is those gold stars are really few and far between in healthcare now. So, really looking at the things that I'm doing, first of all, do they need to be done at all? If I just kind of stop doing it, is anybody really going to notice? Honestly, I bet you a dollar they won't or am I like just kind of glomming onto this project, when in reality the other people who are already doing it could do it far better than me, and I just feel badly for saying no thank you? We just did a roster check-in with our wellness committee, and we gave folks the option. We were like, "Do

you want rotate off?" and we had a number of people be like, "You know what, I love this work, but I can never get to the meetings so yeah, I think it is time for me to rotate off." And it's just like, "Awesome, good on you, see you later!" because I don't want to be clogging the inboxes of the people who then say, "Oh my gosh there's another meeting and I can never make it." I don't want to be the person clogging their inboxes. Like dude, if you can't make it, don't make it, that's fine. You know? And so, I think recognizing what we actually, actually, practically have control over in healthcare, is a really important exercise because when we say what do I have control over, what is my purpose here, I think a lot of the tasks that use our energy when times are really, really busy will frankly just fall by the wayside. And that's cool. Because that opens more time and more energy for the things that really do matter. Both for the patients and families, but also for us so we can keep doing these jobs for you know 20 or 30 years.

MB: Yeah, longevity.

JT: Yeah.

MB: I like you said you were burning valuable energy, right? Yeah, the valuable energy and then we can't keep doing this.

JT: Yeah.

MB: Eventually we just burn out.

JT: Yeah.

MB: And that's no good for anybody.

JT: No.

MB: Well, I really appreciate you meeting with me, sharing your insights, your expertise with us. I'm wondering if there's any last thoughts you have or anything you wanted to share before we close.

JT: I have been doing this for myself since you and I started talking about this topic. Like, really asking myself what am I going to take out of the summer and into the busier months? I've been really good about planning time away, really far in advance for the past few months, and why is that? Why have I gotten so good at it in the past few months? You know why I've gotten so good at it, we are a few faculty down right now, and our new faculty are just now starting so we've just kind of been in a go, go, go energy in the pediatric ICU for the past few months, and so I saw this time coming and I was like, mmmm I'm going to get some vacations on the calendar. And I'm taking that with me that it's like, it doesn't matter if you are planning it eight months in advance, you're getting it on the calendar. So do that. That's what I'm taking, that if you plan time for rest and leisure way far in the future, like no big deal, you can always cancel it if something comes up, but if you never schedule it, you never schedule it and so it never gets done. Right. That's what I'm going to take from this summer into these busier months. And if you just find one thing that you love about the summer and figure out a way to do it in the busier months, you're winning. You're totally winning, because then you are living with agency as opposed to just being pulled around by your schedule, and the whims of how busy things are.

MB: Yeah. It's an intentionality behind it.

JT: Yeah.

MB: Very helpful. Great. Thank you so much.

For any of our listeners who want to learn more about this or many other helpful topics from Dr. Turnbull, we are going to include a link to her blog in our show notes. And that I believe is all everyone. So, thanks for listening to the Healthier You podcast. Until next time, take care.

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