



Episode #11

Interview with Legacy Employee, Jenn Wilson - LMG clinic manager for Surgical Oncology and Colon and Rectal Surgery clinics

Host: Vicki Guinn

Guest: Jenn Wilson

Vicki Guinn:

Hello everyone. It's been a while since I podcasted with you. This is Vicki Guinn with Legacy Health's Marketing and Communications, and I'm glad to be back with another episode of Engaging Our People. We've had a challenging summer that affected all of us, the murder of one of our own, safety and security officer Bobby Smallwood. Bobby remains in our hearts as we return to our normal projects and work. I'm resuming the Engaging Our People with a guest from the Legacy Cancer Institute, Jenn Wilson. Jenn is a clinic manager responsible for several sites in two specialty areas, colon and breast cancer. Did you know that our Legacy Cancer Institute is one of the top cancer programs in this country?

Of course, we have a stellar group of physicians and other providers who provide top-notch care to our patients. I think Jenn contributes to this reputation. She says every day she has opportunity to help people positively change their lives, and she believes that it's not about the roles we hold at Legacy, but who we should be at our core, and that is to care for each other and our patients. So I'm honored to interview Jenn. And if you could see her, you'd easily recognize her. You see, she has the coolest pink hair and beautiful colorful tattoos. Jenn stands in her truth and Jenn stands in her Doc Martens. So I thank Jenn for joining me on Engaging Our People.

Jenn Wilson:

Thank you, Vicki. I am really excited to be here. Thank you for making space for me.

Vicki Guinn:

Absolutely. We're excited to have you here today. So I just have a few questions to ask you. Working in cancer for more than 20 years must have taught you some lessons, and what is your advice for people who take care of these special patients?

Jenn Wilson:

Yeah, wow. We are just jumping right in. So I am grateful that I have been able to, over the last two decades, work with the very special patient population of people diagnosed with cancer. I'll say that when I first started working with cancer patients, I spent a lot of time mad and sad at potential outcomes for people, and I realized over hundreds of patients that that wasn't serving the patient certainly, and it wasn't serving me. So what I did was choose to instead of think of what could happen to this patient, what I know could happen is how I choose to be in this appointment with them.

So I changed my idea of cancer is this terrible thing that is going to harm everybody that it touches, and instead, I think cancer is this terrible thing that I can be a part of healing when I am a part of that patient experience. So what I would say for any of us who are working with cancer patients is be present in this moment. Honestly, none of us know what's going to happen when we leave work tonight, but we know that we're here right now and we have this moment. So what can I do in this moment with this patient or with my team to make it a positive, hopeful, loving, shared experience?

Vicki Guinn:

I love that answer. But now, I mentioned at the beginning you work across several sites, and I don't know if that's even more of a challenge. How do you keep your staff connected across all the sites that you work at? Do you favor one site or the other?

Jenn Wilson:

I'll never tell.

Vicki Guinn:

Go ahead and tell. It's just between us.

Jenn Wilson:

Right, all 14,000 of us. Yeah, so in surgical oncology, I get to manage five different locations and for colon and rectal surgery, we have two different locations. So that's seven altogether, and I have team members far-flung everywhere and a couple remote people. So yeah, I'm in a different place every day and I certainly don't see most of my team members every day, but we do all work to stay connected. So for one, something that's really big for us is we use Teams. So of course we have, each clinic has their Teams channel, but we have other channels that are not devoted just to what's going on today at work, what needs to be rescheduled, what's happening in the clinic.

But we have things like we have a self-care channel. We have a pets channel where we all post pictures of our pets. We have a What's Cooking channel, so we share recipes with each other. And then every day in the general chat, I ask a question and it's not work related. And it could be a question like, is a hot dog a sandwich? Or it could be a question like, do you know your life's purpose? So sometimes they're silly and sometimes they're super serious. Last Friday, it was my birthday and the daily question was, what do you love best about me?

Vicki Guinn:

It was all about you that day.

Jenn Wilson:

Yes.

Vicki Guinn:

Did you get some good answers?

Jenn Wilson:

I did, actually really thoughtful. I am so grateful for the people that I work with. Honestly, they're the best. Another thing that we do is we draw affirmation cards as a team at different sites. And so if I'm at

that site, I will take a group photo and we'll put that in the chat also, like here's the affirmation cards from Good Sam today, and then a couple of the sites will take photos also and put them in the group chat when I'm not there too. So it's just a way that we also share that experience with each other across sites.

Vicki Guinn:

I just wonder, how do you do that? Because it goes above and beyond being a leader.

Jenn Wilson:

Well, before I am a person of Legacy, capital P, I'm me, I'm Jenn, and who I am in the world is a person who cares deeply about connection. Remember, the why that I have is for the people. And so I want people to feel good about being in the clinic. The work that we do is hard. The work that we do can sometimes go unappreciated, and also the work that we do is sacred. Even on those days when it feels like drudgery, it is sacred, and I want the team to feel joy in equal measure with that hard work that they're doing. And so if that means, I tell jokes, that we share hugs, that we laugh with each other, share affirmation cards, like, we're people before we're the roles in our clinic, just like our patients are people before they have the diagnosis.

Vicki Guinn:

This requires you to really be in sync or in touch with the people you work with, because I'm sure you're doing temperature checks all day every day with your staff to be able to know when they need to be lifted up or how they're doing. I mean, that's the way it sounds to me. And it sounds like that brings you joy is being able to help others.

Jenn Wilson:

Yeah, for sure. I feel like why I am here, like I said, is to encourage and inspire people. The thing though, I have seven sites, and so I'm not shoulder to shoulder with most of my co-workers every day.

Vicki Guinn:

Tell me this, how did you manage those seven sites before the pandemic? I know post-pandemic, a lot of us are virtual. Were you actually driving to all of those sites?

Jenn Wilson:

Yes, and I still do.

Vicki Guinn:

Really?

Jenn Wilson:

Yeah, yeah. It's funny because I'm used to, I don't know, maybe this is just me before I was a titled leader, you don't want your manager on site. You love when they're not there. But my teams will text me or tease me like, girl, where are you? They want me to be there. So I'm very grateful for that too. Most of them. Most of them. So there are the days when they're like, oh, Jenn, go away. Go to another site today. But because I'm not shoulder to shoulder with my team every day, it's important to me that I continually fill them with the idea that their most important work is to take care of themselves. And so

it's not that I go up and temperature check my 40 team members every day. I can't. I rely on them to say to me, "Hey, Jenn, I'm not well. I have this thing going on."

And they can be as vulnerable as the relationship allows for them to be. And I'm so grateful for that, that people feel comfortable in sharing things with me so that I can help them in whatever way that they need, whether it's a connection to counseling, or maybe they just need to vent about something that's going on. They need advice on how to manage a conflict that they're experiencing in whatever it is. Of course, I check in with the team that I'm sitting there with, but even when I'm not there with you, the team knows that I'm available.

Vicki Guinn:

You do a whole lot more than performance reviews.

Jenn Wilson:

I'm blessed, awesome, honestly, at the bureaucracy part of my job, I really am a people person. I thrive on relationships and being with the people that I work with, like reports and things like that are not as fun.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh, boy. Yeah, I agree. One thing I'm hearing you say that I think it's pretty interesting, but I want you to share. You have built trust. And even though you haven't said it, that's very important, when people feel comfortable approaching you or they feel that they can approach you in confidence. Can you say something to the other several hundred leaders that we have? How are you able to do that?

Jenn Wilson:

Well, trust is, that's something that's built, right? And you hope that you have a strong relationship with anyone with that foundation of trust and mutual respect. And so something, ways that I build trust with people is by expressing my own vulnerability. If I don't have the answer or know the answer, I'm going to tell you, "I don't know. Let's find out." When I feel scared, I'm going to tell you I feel scared. At the beginning of COVID, I was equally as scared as everyone else in March of 2020. I didn't know either, and I was perfectly okay to share those feelings. The things that are going on around on some of our campuses now are scary, and I am super okay with allowing my own fear and anxiety to show through along with, "And here's what I'm going to do about it and how I'm going to help us through it as a team."

I think that by modeling what I hope to see in the clinic and experience with my coworkers, that empowers them to know that they can feel safe with me. And honestly, it's things like doing what I say I'm going to do, but keeping confidence with people when they do share things with me. So I have consistent behavior, I show up for them. And by doing that year over year over year, they do know, okay, she's a safe person. I can trust her with this very hard thing.

Vicki Guinn:

I heard you, I know we've talked about you being vulnerable. And so that is really a quality not only for leaders, but for all of us. If people can see us be vulnerable, that brings the human-ness to the person, at least I think so, because we all want to be superheroes in what we do, but sometimes those days we can't put the cape on.

Jenn Wilson:

Yeah. I think that vulnerability is such strength, and you cannot be a superhero if you don't express vulnerability.

Vicki Guinn:

So what do you do? How do you manage the stress or anxiety or burnout that comes from just being human and working in healthcare?

Jenn Wilson:

Yeah, so burnout and stress and anxiety, that's the trifecta, right? That we have been experiencing so much, certainly more than ever the last three or four years. And I think it's really important that we acknowledge it, first and foremost. So how we acknowledge it is by allowing ourselves to feel the feelings that are coming up for us. So there's also sort of in current day, this new wave of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue that are going around, along with our usual suspects of burnout of the day-to-day work and the stress and anxiety and being a healthcare worker is harder than ever. So it's acknowledging that. We can't pretend that everything's great all the time. Everything isn't awesome all the time. And so the idea that we shatter, because we do shatter. There is a Japanese art called kintsugi, and the idea is that when something shatters, rather than putting it together with clear gorilla glue that you can't see because you can still see the cracks in the vase, you paint those cracks with gold.

So now those cracks are highlighted as part of this beautiful thing like, look, it's been shattered, but look, it's rebuilt. It's stronger, and I think that we can kintsugi ourselves and we can kintsugi your teams so we don't move through things. Everything that we experience, we carry with us. So how are we carrying it gives us resilience, helps us build resilience to move through, to get through things that are hard in the right now. So when we're feeling burned out, being able to say, "Hey, this is what I'm experiencing," knowing what does that even look and feel like, when I'm becoming irritable, when my sleep is disrupted, when I'm losing interest in hanging out with my friends, when I cry all the time. They're symptoms of stress and burnout. And so it's not ignoring those, not trying to be the superhero person, but acknowledging that we all are going through stuff and we might need help.

Reaching out for help is also something that is so important that we're doing, whether it be with a trusted friend or through our awesome and very robust employee assistance program that we have here at Legacy, in whatever way is meaningful and helpful for each of us individuals, we should be doing that. I talk a lot about that with my teams to the point where I think that I'm about this close to getting temporary tattoos of Canopy's phone number for my team. So I think by constantly talking about mental health and managing all that encompasses being a healthcare worker, my teams know that they are safe in expressing things like, "I'm stressed, I'm burned out. I have compassion fatigue. Where do I go from here?"

Vicki Guinn:

Okay. I'm going to ask you sideways questions. Who's your favorite musician?

Jenn Wilson:

My favorite musician in the whole wide, wide world is Stevie Nicks and Fleetwood Mac.

Vicki Guinn:

I can see that.

Jenn Wilson:

An entire thigh of tattoos dedicated to Stevie Nicks.

Vicki Guinn:

Do you sing those during karaoke?

Jenn Wilson:

Yes, I do. I do.

Vicki Guinn:

How did I know that?

Jenn Wilson:

Karaoke clinic, the commute.

Vicki Guinn:

You sing at work?

Jenn Wilson:

Oh, yeah. I work with Nathalie Johnson, so I have to.

Vicki Guinn:

Yeah, I heard she sings and dances.

Jenn Wilson:

She does. She does, daily.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, thank you Jenn Wilson so much for joining us on Engaging Our People. You've shared a lot of nuggets, a lot of great advice, a lot of inspiration in our few minutes here today, and thank you. And thank you for allowing me to take you away from your several clinics and your subspecialty. How many staff?

Jenn Wilson:

Oh my gosh. There's like around 40. I don't know.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh my gosh.

Jenn Wilson:

I don't have the exact number.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, I know we're going to have 40 listeners to this podcast.

Jenn Wilson:

At least 30.

Vicki Guinn:

At least 30? Well, thank you again for joining us today.

Jenn Wilson:

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Vicki Guinn:

Again, thank you, Jenn, for your time and the words that have inspired us. Thank you for reminding us to live our mission, to work our mission, to enjoy our mission. This podcast is for all of us at Legacy, and was created as an opportunity to share stories, build connections, and learn from one another. If you're hearing this message, you've listened to the full episode, and I thank you. We value your feedback, so please take a moment and drop us a message at podcasts@lhs.org and tell us about your ideas for stories or how we can better engage our people. This is Vicki Guinn with Legacy's Marketing and Communications. Thank you. Be safe and be well.