

Ep #114: Never Waste a Crisis with Dr. Rose Marie Thomas



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Una

The EntreMD Podcast

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Hi docs, welcome to *The EntreMD Podcast*, where it's all about helping amazing physicians just like you embrace entrepreneurship so you can have the freedom to live life and practice medicine on your terms. I'm your host, Dr. Una.

Dr. Una: Well hello, hello. Welcome back to another episode of *The EntreMD Podcast*. You know I am excited that you are listening. And I'm also excited because I have the wonderful Dr. Rose Marie Thomas, a pediatrician in the beautiful island of Trinidad. And she's our guest today.

She is an amazing physician, an amazing human, explores all dimensions of life, so much fun to be around. So, you are going to get so much out of this as far as wisdom goes and strategies and action steps and all that. But you're going to have so much fun with this.

So, Dr. Rose Marie Thomas, welcome to *The EntreMD Podcast*.

Dr. Rose Marie: Thank you very much. I'm really honored to be in the VVIP room with you.

Dr. Una: VVIP, I love it. I love it. And if you're listening to the podcast, this is one of those you're going to need to go watch on YouTube as well because she's like hair is so beautiful, her office space is beautiful. I was going like, "I thought I was the host here." Okay, so you need to check her out. She's just phenomenal. So, I want you to take a moment to introduce yourself to the listeners.

Dr. Rose Marie: Great, well my name is Rose Marie Thomas and I come all the way from Trinidad and Tobago. I trained in the states. I consider myself a world citizen, born in Canada, lived in the states, Jamaica, back to Trinidad, so I'm all over the place. But it's good because it means I have a perspective that's different.

I help parents who are anxious about their child's wellbeing and I'm intentional in my advice in health, learning, and parenting. That's me.

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Dr. Una: That's you. And your practice is called Frontier Kids Pediatrics. I've never asked you, why did you pick that name?

Dr. Rose Marie: That's a great question. It's called Frontier Kids Care and we call it like a medical home, and because we think we're at the frontier of health. So, Frontier. And I moved office to this new location like 12 years ago. Did I tell you I was a pediatrician for 25 years, just about?

Dr. Una: You didn't say that. 25 years, people. Some of you listening are 25. She's been a pediatrician the whole time.

Dr. Rose Marie: Yeah, so we think we're at the frontier. We aim to be at the frontier of what's happening in medical care. And that's why I'm in your business school. Because I felt I needed to do something really important when the pandemic started.

Dr Una: I love it. I love all of it. Now, you have a unique take on how you practice pediatrics and how you, you know, anyone listening from kids care you should already see. But what is your unique spin. What is the difference between your practice and other practices in the area?

Dr. Rose Marie: Well, part of it is my worldly perspective. And what we say is we prescribe distilled wisdom as a healing remedy. So, you might say, what is distilled wisdom? Distilled wisdom is like our experience of standard pediatric care. And we take that and blend it with your stories. Patients come with such amazing stories. Now, West Indians are born storytellers. We tell a story for everything.

Dr. Una: I didn't know that.

Dr. Rose Marie: Oh, absolutely, Anancy Stories, that's where they come from. So, we take that, the patient's stories, their pain, their anxiety, their wins, and their challenges, and we blend it and distill it down and we use – I have the West Indian frame of looking at life. So, when we bring it, it's

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culturally appropriate, but still, it can be on the world stage. So, that's what distilled wisdom is.

And when we do this, the result of it is that parents realize the gifts that their children are and we unlock their full potential, so they can be the best that they can be for their future given their gifts. You know, everybody has gifts, so a child with cerebral palsy has gifts. A child on the autism spectrum has huge gifts. And our job is to help that child unlock those gifts, open the gifts and unlock the door to their full potential.

Dr. Una: I have not heard this. and we've talked quite a bit. This is so good. So, give me some of those stories. Like, when you say a child with Cerebral Palsy has a gift, a child on the autism spectrum has a gift and all these other things, give me one or two stories from the patients in your practice, some of those that you've distilled down.

Dr. Rose Marie: Yes, okay. So, for example, I have this 16-year-old, and you know, I give a tiny lollipop when they come for their visits, 25 calories of sugar or something, just a small amount. And they know it's only a special time when they come for their annual visits and stuff.

So, this 16-year-old looks at me. He has Asperger's, or he's on the spectrum. He says, "Dr. Rose Marie, I know why you give lollipops, you know." I said, "Really, why?" He says, "That's to make patients keep on coming and coming and coming." And I'm like, "Okay now, you've found me out." Or, you know, another one, I'll say to a little kid, "Would you like..." you know, when they have their birthdays, they get little presents, like a little dinosaur or a car.

So, I said to one, "Would you like a dinosaur or a car?" And he says to me very straight-faced, "I want a dinosaur car." And what do you do when they come with this, you know?

And you see, the thing about it, play is the cornerstone of everything we do. Because play is children's work. And especially at a time like this when

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people are anxious, the kids love to come into the office and they get to chat, play pretend doctor, pretend anything, you know. So, those are some of the stories.

The other day too, I mean, I love to see children with developmental issues because there's so much you can do. And I felt so good, this teen – he's like 21 now and his mom, I've known him forever, and his mom brought him by just to say that he finished his university degree and he's going to do information technology. And there he is, posing with me, this child whose mother was in tears so many times, concerned about the child, and here he is, a gift to the world.

Dr. Una: Wow, so that means when families come to you, they're not just getting pediatric care in the traditional sense of it. They're getting a whole package, almost like they're getting, I want to say a parenting coach, if you will. That's probably not the best term to use, but it's a whole thing. And you're lending them your belief, which is something I find so powerful for kids to see, that somebody believes in them.

They maybe have a label or they maybe have been told, "You can't do this." But there's so much power in a doctor looking at them and telling them, "You can do this." Because we're the quote unquote smart ones. If my doctor things I can, then maybe I just can. That is so good.

Dr. Rose Marie: Well, you know, Dr. Una, words have power. And we can use them for good or bad. So, I'll give you another story. I saw this mom who went away to the US Virgin Islands and she came back many years later when the child was about 12 or so. And he had mild allergies. But I saw this baby at birth.

And the mom says, while she was away, "Dr. Thomas said you're perfect." Because I say this, "Your baby is perfect." And I just say it and I move on. But she held onto these words when the child was going through, you know, particular illnesses. And when she told me that, I was so humbled

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because I never knew that people hold onto your words like that. And if you say something not so nice to them, or even you think it's okay, but they care what speaks to their pain and if that doesn't work too well for them, you might never see them again because you said something that they didn't like to hear. So, words have power.

Dr. Una: I love that you're integrating all of that in your practice. That's so good. So good. I'm sure it's a big separation factor where people went from your practice to another practice. And nothing's wrong with any other practice. I'm sure they have their stories too. But you can't reproduce that. It's not the same as amoxicillin for an ear infection, right? It's a whole package. And that is so beautiful.

And it's so funny you say that because I didn't do the stories in the way that you did, but I brought some personality to my practice as well. And it's so funny because – and it was the moms for me. It was the moms because I'm like, "They have such a hard time. They don't have as much support."

As moms, we don't realize how this journey is going to be. So, it's like a rude shock, like, "Wait a minute," you know? And then the second guessing, like, am I breaking my kid? Am I doing the right thing? So many times, they'll come in and they're crying and it has nothing to do with the child. It's like, "I'm failing as a mom."

And I would always go, like, "You're doing an amazing job." They look at me funny, and I'm like, "Listen, you bathe the kid. You fed the kid. You brought him for his appointment. You're keeping up with stuff. Yes, you may be tired. Yes, your hair may look crazy. But you're doing a great job. This is what mothers do."

And one day, I was leaving a room, I was like, "Alright, amazing job, mom, you should pat yourself on the back, you're doing great." And she's like, "You know this is the reason I come here, right? You're like my therapist."

Dr. Rose Marie: Yes, that's so true.

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Dr. Una: Right, that's what she said. And it made me stop and think, when you do that, it does make a difference. It does. So, listening to you, it gives me chills, like this is so good.

Dr. Rose Marie: No, it's true. Sometimes, half the time I would say, they come not for the problem that they came for. They came for something else. Remember, they come with anxiety, so, "My child has fever. Will he get brain damage?" or whatever, "My child has colic, am I bad mother?"

So, you're really speaking – so, I am a coach, I agree with you. Every day, you coach people. And you know, the distilled wisdom comes from your own stories. For example, when my firstborn was a baby, and you know, you're a doctor, you're supposed to know everything, right? He had really bad colic. And people would stop me and say, "That child has colic." And I'm like, "How do you know?" There are no socks on the child, or you have no cap on the head or whatever.

And I was going berserk. I was tearing my hair out. I was tearful. And I'm a doctor. And luckily, my pediatrician said to me, he told me about being a good-enough parent. It's a book by Bruno Bettelheim. It's called A Good Enough Parent. And that allayed my fears so much. I just started to relax and I realized, "You know what? I'm good. I'm studying, doing exams, being a mom, being everything. No, I'm good." So, you bring that wisdom, your pain, your stories, your challenges, your wins, to what you offer to patients, you know.

Dr. Una: That is so good. So good. Okay, now let's talk private practice and the pandemic. So, everybody had their plans, everybody was like, 2019, December 31st, everyone was like, "Well, here comes 2020, our best year yet," right? And then COVID shows up and there are lockdowns and people are terrified of coming in and all of that, so many practices shut down. And gratefully, yours is still here. So, what kind of challenges did you face during the pandemic, and what did you do to respond to those challenges?

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Dr. Rose Marie: Okay, that's a great question. Well, I call the pandemic and the response not PPE, but private practice in the pandemic, so it's not PPE, it's PPP. But I heard someone say recently, never waste a good crisis. And we were in absolute crisis. As a matter of fact, today we have our third small lockdown, so it continues, ups and downs.

And I just got so busy during the pandemic because I said, "I am not going to be obscure. I am going to fight this. I am a fighter." And I think you may know that I dance. I dance, you know, waltz and Latin dance and stuff. And two years ago, I did a waltz exam and someone told me, "No, you can't do this. You're not good enough yet." And I thought, "If you tell me no, that's yes." And I changed schools. I did the three exams and got honors in it.

But I think of the pivoting because there was a certain point in the waltz exam, I couldn't get the step correctly. And I just practiced and practiced and practiced. And then all of a sudden, one day, I just pivoted. So, that's how it was with my practice in the time of COVID.

I joined the EntreMD Business School because I listened to your podcast. And I really was in awe at every single podcast. I would be just like, "Wow, oh my god, I have to do this." And scared, nervous, concerned about financial things. I decided I'm going to join the business school and it has been the best thing that ever happened to me.

And I think the biggest thing that happened to me, you know, if you have a private practice that you're now starting, it's like building a new house. But here I am now, I have an established house and I have to renovate. Renovation is always more difficult. And you know what the hardest part of the renovation was, but the most important part? Your message.

I went back to that message about 50 times. And I swear to you, until I think I got it right. And it may change, because time change. My message, I kept going back to the beginning, back to the beginning, back to the very

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beginning. Who do I really serve? What are their pain points? What am I doing?

And once I really figured that out, which is what I got from the business school and the amazing Dr. Una and the amazing, amazing group of pediatricians – I shouldn't say pediatricians. A lot of pediatricians, but amazing doctors there was that I got support, I got ideas, and I have just been going from strength to strength.

I engaged a marketing consultant to help me. Because her business is down now, but she's amazing. She made me purpose videos, I learned how to do videos, Facebook lives, email marketing. And I tacked my finances and my schedule.

One of the things I really, really love that I did with the schedule is how to get these patients in. So, we created a system of e-postcards, electronic postcards. So, they get like, "You've got mail," either appointment mail, stating you've missed your appointment, we'd love to see you, or we do birthday reminders. So, the first day of every month, we do a birthday video to all the patients who are born in that particular month and we send out emails to them. And we get about a 10% conversion, which is really quite good, I think.

Dr. Una: That's good. That is good.

Dr. Rose Marie: Yeah, I learned how to do TikTok and I had fun doing it. But everything though is intentional. There's absolutely nothing done that is not intentional because you have to have purpose. You can be all over the place, which is how I was before I think. But I got focus and I got a clear idea of what I have to do to get through this.

I tacked my finances, which were – it's not exactly my favorite thing. But I really started looking at how we spend and cut down on expenses and saw different ways to do things. And then, the third big thing I did was I started a telehealth platform. So, patients can see me virtually in the office and, you

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know, Dr. Rose Marie is here to see you. It's slow to pick up because culturally that's not our thing. People like to come in and talk and touch and feel. But stories virtually don't really cut it.

Dr. Una: And we have to tell those stories.

Dr. Rose Marie: Yeah, but we try. And the other thing we've done – so, I've launched a telehealth platform and I've reorganized my learning not waiting menu. So, previously, when you come into the office, you sit down and you learn something while you wait. So, we would put video clips of the things I had done in the old days, nothing like what I do now. But now, you know, everything is really video-ready and we show them things, listen to different music.

But most importantly, we promote our message. We sell our practice now. That's so huge for me because I am, like you, an introverted introvert. Don't let the smile fool you. I love dealing with my patients and my moms, my dads, but I get my energy recharged from solitude. So, being out there was the scariest thing I've ever done. But I'm doing it afraid and I'm doing it with purpose and just doing it. Because I tell myself, "I can do hard things."

So, the learning not waiting menu is like the TV room now is virtual. So, that's the YouTube channel. So, we just launched that; thank you, thank you. We had launched it before but now we had to reimagine it to fit the present times. So, the resource center that's in my mind, the distilled wisdom is now on Frontier TV as a YouTube channel, so that's my latest win.

Dr. Una: Okay, hang on because I'm going to have to stop you. Because all these things you talked about could be three or four podcast episodes. So, I'm going to unpack this so people get this. Now, first of all, the reason I'm taking time to do this is because people's successes, you can find them in their messages.

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So, a lot of the things Dr. Rose Marie Thomas just said is packed with clues as to why this is working. So, number one, you've been in practice for 25 years. You could have said, "Nobody can tell me nothing because I've been practicing for 25 years." But you are willing to renovate, like completely revamp.

Listen to you, like, "10% conversion rate, my YouTube channel, email marketing." This is not language that physicians who've been in practice for 25 years use. And to hear you adopt that, it shows that you have a growth mindset.

So, for everyone listening, growth mindset, that is one key to success. Then the attitude in the face of a crisis, it could have been whining, complaining, taking the position of a victim. But hear what she said. She said, "I will fight this. I'm not going to be obscure. I'm not going to waste this crisis." And that's the attitude to have because it may not be a pandemic, but there will be challenges. What will your response be?

And in a time when everybody was shrinking back and cutting down on what they were spending, all of that, at the beginning of the pandemic is when she's like, "Yeah, I guess I'll sign up for EntreMD Business School." And that shows the value for investing in yourself, the value for taking a chance on yourself. You bet on so many other things. Why not bet on you?

Because I have never seen the level of uncertainty that showed up during the pandemic, because it's like nobody knows what's going on. Everything that could not be changed was changed. All the schools were closed. Doctors were being laid off. Never heard of before. Every human being is wearing a mask, who had ever seen that before?

We don't know when it will end. We don't know what the government is doing. There was so much uncertainty. But you still said, "In the midst of all that, I'm saying yes to me." I had to write this down because it was so good. If you see me looking down, that's what I'm doing.

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And then she's like, "So I went back to the foundations." So, if you're not in the EntreMD Business School, the first stage after you define what your business is, is the message stage. Who is my ideal client? What pain point do I solve for them? What solution do I give them? What's my I-help statement?" And someone who's been in practice for 25 years can say, "I don't need that." But you heard her say, "I went back up to 50 times." Again, that goes back to that growth mindset. That goes back to, "I can make this better. I can learn more. I can get my foundation even stronger." It's a growth mindset. So, success leaves clues.

Started telehealth, and I love your learning not waiting. That is so phenomenal. Like, why wait in the waiting room when you can learn in the waiting room? "I sell my practice now." And I remember you saying that, posting in the Facebook group for the business school, "Now I'm comfortable selling my practice." It's so amazing.

And, "I can do hard things. I can do hard things." And that's something you've said and said and said that, in fact, if someone says, "I can do hard things," I have to look, like, I'm sure Dr. Rose Marie Thomas did that post.

So, this is so good. Thank you for sharing. I just wanted to unpack it because I need people to see, there is just so much gold in that. And it shows why it's working. You have a YouTube channel. So, we're doing a speak to grow challenge and everybody is starting a YouTube channel. You could have said, "I have a YouTube channel."

But you're like, "No, I'm going to reimagine it. I'm going to make it even better." And that's why you're Frontier Kids Care and that's why you're leading the way because of all that. And it's true, it's not flattery. You know I don't flatter people. That's the truth.

Excellent, okay, so now I want to hear – so now that you've done this, what impact has it had on your practice? How has it changed how your patients

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perceive you, how you're perceived in the community. What has it done for you as a person?

Dr. Rose Marie: Well, that's a great question. There has been tremendous growth as a person because, you know, you have your ups and downs and we still have our ups and downs. I've learned to take life easy. I'll give you that story at the end. It's a good story. But the parents love it. They say, "Dr. Rose Marie, we love seeing you on YouTube..." not so much YouTube yet, but on Facebook and Instagram.

They may not comment, but when they come in, they say, "By the way, I love everything you're doing. I have this one dad, he texts me and he says, you know, "I just love what you're doing. Keep on doing it." And you know, I started asking for people to just post their reviews on Google for me. I never did that before, never.

But you have to be intentional, so I called three of my parents who I know, and they were like, "We are so happy to do that for you." You know, and they posted such lovely reviews that I feel honored to have. And I never reply to reviews. They're there, they come, good or bad, and I just leave it right there. Fortunately they're mostly good. But I don't need to reply. It's just what they feel and I'm grateful for that.

We are seeing a couple of telehealth visits. Each month, we do more. We're now monitoring the progress of that. We have our mailing list, so people are coming in for their birthday checkups. And what else is happening at Frontier Kids?

We just feel, although we are anxious about what's happening, we feel very optimistic about the future because we've done the hard work, and life will go up and down. So, you want to hear my take life easy story?

Dr. Una: Yeah, let's do it.

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Dr. Rose Marie: So, that's the next thing about all of this. You just have to take life easy. You can't stress about all the ups and downs because you'll get yourself in the grave too early and stuff like that.

So, I remember going to an American Academy of Pediatrics meeting a couple of years ago, in the days when we went to real meetings. And I saw this really distinguished gentleman who had a badge on which said, "40 years a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics."

And I'm like, "Wow, 40 years, how does that happen?" So, I went up to him and I said – this is in New Orleans, okay, so you can hear the accent. And he said to me, "Just take life easy." So, I'm like, "Wow..."

Do you know, the next time I went back to a meeting there, the person at the desk hands me this purple badge. And I'm like, "What is this?" She said, "Well, you're a member 20 years." I'm like, "What?" In shock because despite all the ups and downs, stuff happened and there's progress even when you didn't know progress was being made.

So, when I'm going through difficult times like we are now, I wouldn't lie to you, it is difficult. I remember, you have to just take life easy, do the hard work, and just know, at some point, you will succeed. You will have your ups and downs, but at the end of the day, you're a better doctor, you're a better everything, a better person.

Dr. Una: Take life easy...

Dr. Rose Marie: Easy, New Orleans twang.

Dr. Una: So, every time you face a crisis or at times something doesn't go your way and all of that, just remember Dr. Rose Marie Thomas in New Orleans and take life easy. And I love that you said that even though it doesn't look like a lot is happening, you're making progress. Because I think it's especially important for entrepreneurs because in the beginning, whether you are growing or scaling, whether you're starting or scaling, in

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the beginning of that process, you look like you're putting a lot in and you thought, "I'll do this one YouTube video and I won't be able to see the number of patients who will come banging on my doors."

And you're like, "Well, they didn't come." But if you'll stay consistent, you'll get the result, you know what I mean? And so, in that place between, "I'm excited, let's do this," and, "I'm excited, I saw the result." In that interval there, just take life easy.

I love it, this is so, so, so good. Alright, so we have a lot of doctors who are listening and who get inspired by the podcast, who get action steps to take from the podcast and all of that. What final words will you leave them with?

Dr. Rose Marie: I would say, you have to know your purpose in life and you have to know your purpose in what you're doing. If you don't know your purpose, as Shakespeare has said, "To thine own self be true." If you don't go back to the essence of who you are, you can't be authentic. So, go back to it. Find out what it is. Find out your passion, what you like doing. Is it stories? Is it dancing? Is it fashion? Is it art, literature, IT?

Whatever it is, you bring it into your work and then the work becomes easier and you thrive because you're doing what you love. And in time, everything will be just fine. You work hard, stay to your message, know what your ideal client's pain is. And every time you see them, it's so easy to do your videos and so on now because every time you see someone, you ask, "What is this person's pain and how can I help them?" And then, you get paid well for it.

Dr. Una: Yes, you serve and you earn.

Dr. Rose Marie: That's correct.

Dr. Una: So, when I was asking for final words, I didn't know you'd throw that bomb at us; purpose. That is so powerful. And you know, I think that's

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the cure for burnout in lots of cases. Because it brings meaning to your work. And it brings a level of fulfillment that nothing can really give you.

So, especially if you are running your own thing, your own ship, just bring all of you. Bring all of you. And this is just so good. Thank you so much for sharing this. So, where can people find you? And I also want you to tell us how we find your YouTube channel, so we can go there, we can support, we can subscribe, we can share it, this amazing doctor who dispenses distilled wisdom and amazing stories.

Dr. Rose Marie: Well, if you want more distilled wisdom, come and check out our Caribbean pediatric practice on frontierkidscare.com. You can converse with us on Facebook and Instagram @frontierkidscare as well. We have Frontier TV. I think the channel is still called Frontier Kids Care. That's your YouTube channel. And what else do we have? We're on Instagram, Facebook, yeah, that's mainly it I think for now.

Dr. Una: I love it, Frontier Kids Care everywhere, people. How about that for consistency and branding. Thank you so, so much for coming on. Thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for sharing your perspective. And thank you for sharing the things you did that are making you successful so people can borrow those and go do the same thing. I really appreciate it. Thank you do much for coming on.

Dr. Rose Marie: And thank you. It was an honor to be in the VVIP room with you.

Dr. Una: The VVIP.

Dr. Rose Marie: I made it. I did it.

Dr. Una: You did it. This is good. I'm happy you came – I'll call it the VVIP room too. So, thank you for coming to the VVIP room.

Dr. Rose Marie: Yes, yes.

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Dr. Una: To everyone listening, if you got any value out of this at all, I want you to share this episode with another doctor in your life and tell them, “Listen, Dr. Una is amazing, but you need to listen to Dr. Rose Marie Thomas.” So, do that. You can share it on social media. You can tag me, #entremd. You can tag her, #frontierkidscare. We’ll both look out for it, shout you out as well, and reshare your stuff. So, thank you so much for listening and I will see you on the very next episode of *The EntreMD Podcast*.

Dr. Rose Marie: Bye.

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