

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Una

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

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 everybody. Welcome back to another episode of *The EntreMD Podcast*. I'm super pumped that you're here. I am excited because, one, I get to serve you. But secondly, I have the amazing Dr. Rebecca Berens here and we're going to be talking about all things entrepreneurship.

You know that I love autobiographies and I love sharing stories like behind the scenes what's going on with entrepreneurs because we can learn some lessons from the highly polished Instagram post that says I built my business yesterday and now I work from the beach sipping margaritas half the day. But it's something else to hear the stories of an entrepreneur who's in the trenches doing the work building it. There are just so many lessons there.

So, Dr. Berens, welcome to the show. I'm so happy you're here.

Dr. Berens: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Una: Absolutely. All right, so I'm going to give you a moment to introduce yourself to the listeners, you know, tell them about who you are, what kind of practice you run and all of that.

Dr. Berens: Yeah, so my name is Rebecca Berens. I'm a family physician and an IBCLC, which is International Board Certified Lactation Consultant in Houston, Texas. And I have a direct primary care practice in the Heights area of Houston. And I also do lactation consults for new parents.

Dr. Una: Yeah, and I would have needed you when I was a new parent, Dr. Berens. You should have been there for me.

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

Dr. Berens: Well I needed me too, that's why I'm a lactation consultant now.

Dr. Una: There you go. I'm grateful you do what you do because even as a pediatrician I was throwing my, yeah, okay, so let's not talk about that.

So I want to go back to the beginning because you are what we call an EBS master. So you've been in the EntreMD Business School for longer than a year. And I want you to take us back all the way to before you joined. What was your business like? What was life like before you started on this journey?

Dr. Berens: Yeah, so I opened my practice in January of 2020, which was fabulous timing on my part. And so when I joined EBS was June of 2021 and my first year was obviously very rocky because of the pandemic. Right after I opened I ended up with about three months working from home during my son's naps for like two hours a day because I had no childcare. I also found out I was pregnant the same week that the pandemic shut everything down. So I just had a rough first year.

And so when I came back in 2021, I was ready to hit the ground running and really make the progress I needed to on my practice. But I could tell that I was going to need some help. I had about 55 patients, I think, when I went on maternity leave with my daughter, and so I just was struggling to figure out how to grow and how to become more profitable.

Dr. Una: And that was June, so that's a little over a year at this point.

Dr. Berens: Yeah, a little over a year, but really just about a year because of the time I lost between the pandemic and maternity leave and all of that.

Dr. Una: Yeah. Okay, so now you've embraced this other journey, you know, you've got strategy and mindset shifts, community, coaching, and all of that stuff. What does business look like today if you could do a before and after picture?

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

Dr. Berens: Yeah, so I think when I joined EBS I think I maybe had about 80 to 100 patients, somewhere in there. And I'm at about 185 now. And in that time I've also hired an in-person assistant and moved into a larger office. I was previously just subleasing from someone, now I have my own office that's just mine.

And I have made some adjustments to my pricing and my business model to kind of help things be more stable and also attract patients that really want to work with me as their primary care physician for the long haul, not someone who's just looking for a quick urgent care visit or something like that. So it definitely brought a lot of stability to the business as well.

Dr. Una: And do we love stability? I love stability. Love it.

Dr. Berens: Absolutely.

Dr. Una: Yeah, and for me I've noticed that business is amazing, but a lot of times it's a means to an end, right? It's not an end in itself. We want to serve, we serve and we earn, but there is a so that, right? And that usually shows up in our personal life, shows up in our relationships, our availability for our families and all of that stuff.

So building your business in a way where it's more stable, you know, it's more like what you want it to be and all of that. How has that impacted your personal life?

Dr. Berens: Yeah, so when I joined EBS, I think my daughter was six or seven months old. I think she was seven months old. And I was working have really long hours between my business but then also my part-time job that I was using to actually pay the bills while trying to run my business. I was working probably 10, 12 plus hours a day.

And my goal was to eventually work mom hours, or what I call mom hours, which is nine to three. And I'm definitely getting closer to that. So I've been able to reduce my part-time job hours quite a bit as I've built the business

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

and become a little bit more financially stable. And that has just taken so much stress off of me when I'm at home with my family.

I used to spend hours every evening just stressing out doing business related activities because I didn't really have a direction or a strategy, I was just kind of constantly thinking and trying to do things. And now I think I have a little bit more of a strategy so when I am at home I don't have to be so focused on that, I can be more focused on my family when I'm there.

Dr. Una: And all the mommies say amen, because that's what we want, right? Like work when you're at work, but oh my goodness, when you're at home be home, right?

Dr. Berens: Absolutely.

Dr. Una: So talk to me about, because you had a unique situation, I remember your daughter was seven because I remember this when you were thinking about signing up. So your daughter was seven, and you had the new practice and we were in the middle of a pandemic, right? Like we were still really, really in the middle of the pandemic at this point.

What were your thoughts, well, more like concerns about joining the business school? Because there's a time issue, there's a family issue and all of that. And then how did you navigate that? How did you make the decision in spite of those things?

Dr. Berens: Yeah, so even when I was attending EntreMD Live before I joined, my daughter was like attached to me the whole time. And I was just like, oh my gosh. You know, it was great but it was sometimes hard for me to pay attention or I would get distracted by her needs, you know, I was still nursing and all of that.

And so I knew that EntreMD Business School had the live calls every week, but they're right kind of during dinner and bedtime. So when you have little ones that, you know, I would come home, I'd be cooking dinner, and then

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

I'd have to get them into bed, there was just really no way that I was realistically going to be able to attend the live calls, the calls with any frequency.

So I was a little bit concerned about that, because I didn't know if that was really still going to allow me to participate. And then I didn't want to kind of like half do it. If I was going to be in the school, I wanted to be in the school. And so I kind of was worried that between my schedule restrictions and then just overall time restrictions that I wouldn't be able to really participate in the way that I needed to.

And I can't remember if it was your Makeda that I talked to, but there is a replay of the live call every week and obviously I could still participate in the Facebook group on my own time. And so I kind of just decided, well, I will commit to doing the things that I need to do just on a different schedule.

And so I listen to the live calls usually on my way to work on Thursday, or in the evening on Wednesday, depending on if they're uploaded yet and if I have time that evening. And so I've been able to stay on schedule with doing the live calls and everything that way.

Dr. Una: Now, your story is really fascinating because that is the reality for a lot of entrepreneurs, or it could be their reality, right? Because there are some legit reasons why you may not be able to engage like somebody else. But the important thing is to create your own custom way of doing it.

And so the calls are Wednesday evenings and then you decided that's cool, I'll just do my calls on Thursday. And it's amazing because you've done this for over a year. It's not like you made this decision yesterday and you're telling us about it. Like you did it. And you would post any questions you had in the group and stuff and I'm like, she's still doing this. I was really amazed by this.

And the reason why I'm stopping to acknowledge this is because this is what we do. When I started my journey as an entrepreneur, the first thing I

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

did was a speaking program and the hallmark was go on stage and go speak. But I'm a doctor that works nine to five and then I run my own practice. And they want you to speak on Tuesday at 11am. Like how am I supposed to do that, right? But I still had to figure out how to learn.

So everything they were doing, I did a weekly show with a Facebook live so I could practice everything, right? So it wasn't like what everybody else was doing. But oh, I did get my return on investment in that program because I made a decision. You know what I mean?

And so for everybody listening, you may go like I have young kids or the way my life is set up and all of that stuff, but you can work things out. And not just for a program, but even for your business, right? That ability to pivot and adapt and shift that's so amazing. And you did it so beautifully, so I just want to acknowledge that because you're amazing. I mean, you've been doing it, so that's so great.

Now, you talked about not necessarily having strategy and stuff like that. So the results that you have seen so far, and I know for you it's just the tip of the iceberg, right? What are some of those mindset shifts or strategies that have made a difference in your business?

Dr. Berens: I think the biggest thing for me was when I started my DPC practice I got a lot of advice and information from various DPC groups and books and conferences. And a lot of them focus a lot on the initial startup, which is usually just the doctor. But there's not as much out there for when you're trying to grow, how to do that and how to leverage that.

So a lot of people who are starting up with DPC, they're starting by themselves. And there are some people who continue by themselves, they never hire staff, they don't want to have staff. And so that was kind of the model that I expected that I would do.

But at least for me, with my family's needs and the way that I work, I very quickly realized that I couldn't do it by myself. And I just had no concept of

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

how I was ever going to be able to hire someone because I hadn't built that into my business model financially and I just was afraid of the process, to be frank.

And so really just the mindset of like using a team to focus your time where it needs to be focused, which for me is seeing my patients and being with my family, and not focusing on the minutia. That's been really, really helpful. And just the idea that I can do that, because I never thought that I would be someone who would hire another person for a job. And so that was a huge shift for me.

And I think the other thing too, was figuring out the value that you're providing to people. And, again, I think in a lot of the DPC community groups it's a lot of focus on keeping care very affordable, and doing a lot of work for your patient. Which is obviously what we're what we're aiming to do, but the lowest price possible is not going to be stable for your business and you're not going to be able to stay open.

So you have to make adjustments to the model to be able to serve the patients well and take good care of them. And not just, you know, kind of go to the lowest bidder, which I think is often how a lot of it is portrayed.

Dr. Una: So that's a lot of money mindset shifts, right?

Dr. Berens: Yes.

Dr. Una: Whether it's money mindset in the sense of being able to hire people or money mindset in the sense of your value going after the people who are best suited for you and stuff like that. And that's amazing. That really is amazing.

So when you think about your business now, because I'm just curious, like over the next 12 months what is your dream? What are you working towards? What do you want it to look like? Because we're going to do

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

another podcast interview 12 months from now. You'll be saying, "Dr. Una, we did it, let me tell you."

Dr. Berens: You know, I'm not really sure to be honest. That's kind of been part of my struggle the whole time. And I've definitely gotten better with envisioning the future being in EBS, but I'm still not quite, I still haven't quite figured out yet what I want to do. But trying to focus on building the practice to fit around my life rather than the other way around.

And always the most important thing to me is making sure that I'm serving my patients well and taking good care of them. But I think I've kind of let things get, you know, I fell into the same habits I did when I was employed, of just doing everything for everyone else and kind of fitting myself in around it. And I think I'm trying to build it so that it works for me and my family, and it works for the patient.

And I think part of the way I'm going to do that is by focusing a little bit on a specific population in my practice and trying to optimize everything to best serve them. And that'll help a lot with efficiency and it'll help a lot with my staff understanding how to get people on boarded and hopefully make things a little bit simpler for my staff and then simpler for me as well.

Dr. Una: Love it. So you're trying to create a win win situation. A practice that's a win for your patients, but also a practice that's a win for your family. And I love that.

Dr. Berens: Yeah, absolutely.

Dr. Una: And I think in the EntreMD world we talk about this a lot, like business is very important but it's always family first, right? So wanting to build it that way is wonderful, I love it.

For somebody who's an entrepreneur, right, you've been an entrepreneur for a while now, right? So someone who's an entrepreneur, a physician entrepreneur, if you could only give them one piece of advice, and of

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

course there's more, but you can only give them one. If they were standing by the elevator, it was almost time for the elevator to open and they will go in and then you'd go your way, what would you tell them?

Dr. Berens: Man, that's hard. I think, you know, you can figure it out. Like you're smart enough to figure this out. It's a learning curve in terms of a lot of us don't have much of business education. The sales piece is usually horrible for most of us, we hate the word sales, we hate the word marketing. But you've learned harder things than this before. So you can figure it out, you just have to jump in and do it. And as you do it, you will figure it out on the way down.

Dr. Una: There you go, you can figure it out and anything you need to do for your business or learn for your business is easier than whatever you had to learn for med school, so we can do this. I love it.

All right, and then second question, what would you say to the doctor who's been listening to the podcast, has come for some of our live things, has really thought about the EntreMD Business School, but not sure it's for them, or that they can do it, or they can keep up with it and stuff like that. What would you tell them?

Dr. Berens: I mean, I think, at least how it was for me, the way I looked at it was, I'm going to keep going in the business anyway, I might as well do it with some support because otherwise my efforts are probably going to be wasted. So a lot of people have concerns about the time commitment or the financial commitment, but you're going to be doing these things anyway, so why not do them better? Because that's going to save you time and money later.

So I think that that's the biggest thing for me, is like you can try to fumble through and figure it out yourself but it's going to take you longer and you're probably going to make some costly mistakes. So you might as well do it with the right support.

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

Dr. Una: Yeah, costly mistakes. So I used to think mistakes were not expensive till I started a business. I was like these life lessons are pretty expensive. I just remembered that when you said that, but I love your reframe.

So what you're saying is you may think this will cost you time and this will cost you money. But the truth of the matter is that it will save you time and it will save you money. That's so beautiful. I'm taking that with me to the bank.

Okay, tell people where to find you because you're amazing and I love the way you're building your practice. I love the way you've owned your social media. I love the fact that you have put your stake in the ground and you're like, I am going to build a business that will really serve my my patients because that's why I'm here. What will give me the opportunity to be there for my family, which is what matters to me and all of that stuff. So where can people follow you and all of that?

Dr. Berens: So I'm on Instagram at @RebeccaBerensMD. And I'm also on TikTok now, thanks to EBS, at Rebecca Berens MD as well. And my practice is called Vida Family Medicine. And the website is vidafamilydpc.com.

Dr. Una: Love it. And TikTok has been good for you I heard. I hear you now have patients finding you from TikTok.

Dr. Berens: I do. One of the EBS challenges put me on TikTok, which I did not expect to ever do. And I ended up having one of my videos go sort of viral and I've had several patients who found me that way. So that was exciting.

Dr. Una: I mean, amazing things happen when you put yourself out there. I love it. All right people, so first of all, Dr. Rebecca, thank you for coming on and thank you for taking us behind the scenes and being vulnerable sharing triumphs and trials. I truly appreciate it because it is so encouraging

Ep #239: How I Grew My Practice in a Pandemic Year Against All Odds with Dr. Rebecca Berens

for the physician community to see. We need examples of what is possible, and you're a shining example of what is possible. So thank you so much for coming on the show.

Dr. Berens: Thank you.

Dr. Una: And for everyone listening if you have, again, this is not for everybody, you know yourself. You've been thinking about coming to the business school, you've wished that you could be classmates with the doctors that you've heard on here. You've longed for the coaching accountability community, the EntreMD Business School is calling your name, answer the call. Okay, so entremd.com/business.

Come join us, it was built for you, to support you, to help you to do what you're trying to do. Whether that's to build a multi seven figure business, whether that's to build a business that supports you so you can have time with your family, whether that's to start your business. And you get to be classmates with people in all of these phases, which is totally beautiful. So go sign up.

And this episode, if you know another doctor who is starting a business or in business, be sure to share it with them because as always, our stories are so powerful and there's so many lessons to be learned. So go share the episode and I will see you on the next episode of *The EntreMD Podcast*.

Hey, if you love listening to *The EntreMD Podcast* I want to invite you to join EntreMD On Demand. It is my signature subscription program that gives you access to a library of business courses designed to help you do one thing as a physician entrepreneur, and that is to thrive. Just head out to entremd.com/ondemand and I'd love to have you join us. See you on the inside.