



Episode 241: Meet the New CEO of the National Headache Foundation

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

Hello everyone and welcome to HeadWise, the videocast and podcast of the National Headache Foundation. I'm Dr. Lindsay Weitzel. I'm the founder of MigraineNation and I have a history of chronic and daily migraine that began at the age of four. We are here today with an awesome guest that we should all get to know. I am excited to introduce you to Katy Oakley, the new CEO of the National Headache Foundation. Hello, Katy, how are you today?

Katy Oakley:

Hi Lindsay. I'm doing well, thank you. How are you?

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

I'm good. I am so excited you're here today. Thank you for being here. I brought Katy on because I want everyone to hear her journey and how this has shaped who she is and where she might take the National Headache Foundation in the future, all the exciting things that I am sure she's going to do just based on her backgrounds and what she's been through. I would really like Katy to start by telling us her headache and migraine history as she can really relate to our community given her backgrounds. And I want everyone to hear it directly from her. So, Katy, can you just begin by just telling us about your headache and migraine history and how that led you to be the Executive Director of the National Headache Foundation?

Katy Oakley:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Eleven years ago, I was riding a bike home from work and my front tire got stuck in the change between the street and the sidewalk. And I flew off the front handlebars, and I landed directly on my head without a helmet. And my entire life changed in an instant. At first it was occasional headache and migraine attacks, but after a few months it became daily. I would wake up with a headache. I would go to bed with a headache, and I tried everything to fix, and I say that in air quotes, what was going on.

There were x-rays, CT scans, MRIs. I went to a chiropractor, acupuncturist, massage therapist, physical therapist, three neurologists, even a neurosurgeon. I tried everything I could, but there was no structural damage. We just couldn't figure out how to help me. I had a number of diagnoses at the time: post-traumatic headache, new daily persistent headache, and intractable chronic migraine. I was severely depressed. I ended up needing to take short-term disability from work in my twenties. And it was after about a year that I found a headache specialist. And I did an inpatient program for 10 days at a hospital and it was the first time I finally broke the cycle and I felt some relief. It wasn't perfect, but I found

treatments that really started to work for me and now I'm well managed. Eleven years later I am here and I'm so grateful to be on this side and to be able to help people in our community.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

I love hearing people's stories and how it brought them to work in this field and everything. So, how do you feel that this experience will help you as Executive Director of the National Headache Foundation?

Katy Oakley:

I think there's something so unique to having a headache disorder and what it feels like. You feel really misunderstood often. And there are things now that I realized that I didn't understand at the time myself, the trial and error of medications, step therapy and how that impacts patients and providers the ability to access certain medications. And just how it impacts all aspects of your life, your work, your family, your friends. I think those pieces are deeply ingrained in my life and my experience, so I think it will give me a really authentic understanding of our community and how I can help.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

What sort of areas did you work in prior to coming to the National Headache Foundation that you think might help you in your experience in working in this role?

Katy Oakley:

My background is actually in marketing, which I think is a really great fit for the role. I've worked at really large mission-driven organizations like the American Red Cross, Greenheart International, and The Second City in Chicago, and I actually co-owned a marketing agency at one point. I think my professional experience lends really well as we're trying to help empower and educate patients and to reach as many people as possible. I think there's a unique understanding that marketers have with that that I'm really excited to bring to the community.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

Can you maybe tell us what some of your goals or ideas might be for the near future with the National Headache Foundation? There's so many cool projects and outreach things that the National Headache Foundation has done already. I think that everyone might like to hear what your plans might be.

Katy Oakley:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think at first, it's really reaching more people and using my knowledge and experience to do that. I want those who, if they haven't talked to a provider about what's going on, or they've maybe talked to someone and then have stopped because maybe a medication didn't work or they didn't feel like a provider was listening to them, I want patients to be educated and empowered. I want them to know they are not alone. I know that that really impacted my experience when I felt really lost. I also really am passionate about educating and certifying providers in headache medicine. Especially on the primary care side, I think that there's a lot of really great work that can be done there. But I love our programs, and I think the programs are so great. It's just we need to get them out in the community, and we need more people to know that they're there.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

Do you have any goals in particular related to HeadWise that our audience can look forward to?

Katy Oakley:

Yeah. I am a long-time listener and first-time guest. I think you do such a really wonderful job. I think it's so important to bring researchers and providers and experts and that knowledge that they have in a digestible way for folks to be able to get that information. Honestly, what I really want more of is audience feedback. I really want to know what our audience is passionate about or what's confusing, what's frustrating for them. We can focus our topics on any conversation that they're interested in, but we're here for them. And I think you do such an excellent job of that. But I would love, even more than folks already have, more dialogue with our audience.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

Right. Yeah, I mean, that's a great thing to say. Everyone, we would love for you to have comments. Let us know what you want to learn about, hear about, talk about. So, thank you for saying that, Katy. So, is there anything else you would like to tell our audience before we go? I really just wanted them to get to know who you are and to know that there's someone leading the National Headache Foundation that really understands them. What else would you like to tell them before we go?

Katy Oakley:

I guess I would say that I've been in their shoes or a variation of their shoes, but my job here is to help them. Whether you're a patient who is early in your journey or you've been working on things for a while and not finding success, I work for you. I want to make your lives easier and better, and please let us know how we can. We're going to keep looking at the data. We're going to keep bringing the latest treatment options, the latest research, and our knowledge and understanding. But we really want to help as many people as we can.

Lindsay Weitzel, PhD:

Thank you so much Katy. And thank you everyone for listening in. And please tune in to the next episode of HeadWise. Bye-bye.

Katy Oakley:

Thank you.