

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Let's talk postpartum depression

Jen Fisher (Jen): Hey, this is Jen. Before we get started with today's show, I have a quick ask of you. I want to hear from you if the show has helped you in any way, please take a couple of minutes to rate and review this show. Let us know what you think, let us know what's helped you, let us know what you want more of, what you want less of, but just take a couple minutes to do that. It would mean a ton to me and it'll help us get better and better in the future. I really do want to hear from you.

The birth of a baby is a joyful event, but for many women, that joy can become overshadowed by postpartum depression. According to the American Psychological Association, up to one in seven women experience this serious mood disorder, but despite its prevalence, many do not seek the help and support they need due to stigmas and misinformation. One way we can all help breakdown these barriers is by sharing personal stories and experiences to build greater awareness about postpartum depression.

This is the WorkWell podcast series. Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, chief well-being officer for Deloitte, and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things of well-being.

I'm honored to be joined today by three mothers who also happen to be some of my amazing colleagues from Deloitte: Leticia Roinesdal, Elizabeth Lascaze, and Caitlin Goodrich.

So, I want to kind of go around here. We're not used to having so many people on one show. So, I'm excited that it's like a roundtable. Can you each just share a little bit about your experience and your own story with postpartum depression? Elizabeth, why don't you go first?

Elizabeth Lascaze (Elizabeth): Well, about nine weeks into my pregnancy with my twins, I started having some complications. I had a couple of large benign tumors that were growing in my uterus. And so, my doctor warned me from the outset that it was going to be a difficult and painful pregnancy and that the risk for me losing the babies at seven months or seven weeks would be the same. And so, around 23 weeks, I went into labor in the LA office actually on a Friday afternoon and then that following Monday, I went into the hospital and was admitted to the high-risk perinatal unit where I ended up staying unexpectedly, but on my back, on complete hospital bed rest, for three months. And so, it

was a daily fight for my boys' lives and my health and by some messy-messy miracle, they made it to what's considered twin-term at 36 weeks. And then, I was able to bring Carter and Harrison home. And when I came home from the hospital, the first thing that I actually experienced was PTSD. So, there were a lot of things, sounds like alarms or loud PA announcements or certain songs or smells and sensations would really send me into a tailspin and I would find sometimes I would wake up in a certain position. I would think I was back in the hospital bed, and just everything was completely disorienting to me because I never felt like I knew where I was. So, I did start therapy not too long after I got home from the hospital for the PTSD just to get the panic attacks under control. The postpartum depression for me didn't actually hit until several months later. So, my boys were about 10 months old and I had just returned from my maternity leave and I realized, like after I got the PTSD under control, I was like, I'm really, really tired, like in a way that I didn't know was possible. And so, I mentioned it to a few friends, one of which is a therapist, and she was like, "You know, I think you should go and get looked at." And so, I went, I saw my doctor, and she was like, "Of course, you're tired. You have twins." And I was like, "This feels different. I've been tired my whole life because I've been doing stuff my whole life, but this really feels different. It's like the energy it takes to do something as simple as brush my teeth felt like I was swimming against a riptide." So, she ended up doing an assessment. She came back. She's like, "You're not anemic, but you do have postpartum depression." And she started working with me to kind of put together a wellness plan.

Jen: Oh, we'll get into what that looked like for you, but I would love to hear from our other two guests. Leticia, how about you?

Leticia Roinesdal (Leticia): Sure. And I just want to say that Elizabeth was actually a critical piece of my postpartum story. And I had a very different experience. So, I actually have two kids. So, I have a four year old and a two-and-a-half year old and it was with my second child, my daughter Daniela, where being home with her for six months for such a blessing, but it was also kind of a blurry, hazy time for me. And once my husband had gone back to work and my mom was here from Brazil for a while, when she had left, I started realizing that I just kept wanting to find more things to do. So, I kept kind of adding things to my day with my daughter. So, I was like, "Oh! whether to go to Mommy Boot Camp or whether to go to Target." and I just would create these like long list of things to do. And then, I would cry, I would cry a lot and I wasn't really understanding why. And I didn't have any issues bonding, which is kind of the classic thing that you hear with postpartum depression. So, it probably took me 18 months to two full years before I started to realize what had happened and this year in January is actually when I started to get help. So, after going through postpartum, what they've, my doctor and my team around me, has now said that I actually went from postpartum depression, what my husband describes as my cloud phase, and it really was like cloud to my family. I mean I was either constantly crying or just kind of numb and transitioned into high anxiety, chronic anxiety where to battle the numbness and to battle the sadness, that behavior of making lists and doing more things became kind of my survival mode. So, I was really in fight or flight at all times. So, it took me two years to really start to be able to put words to what had happened, why I was so sad, and kind of how I moved past it, but into something just as serious and just as hard to manage. And it was seeing stories like Elizabeth's, who is in my network, somebody I work with, and then Caitlin and I know she'll share her story. And I was trying to see, "Okay, I recognize some parts of this and maybe something isn't okay with me, maybe it's not my fault, maybe I actually need some help." And December, when we have some time off for the holidays is when it all kind of came to a head for me and I just said, "You know what! It's time to do something about this. I don't want to be numb anymore. I don't want

to be sad anymore. There is so much joy in my life. How do I start to regain control for myself.”

Jen: I commonly have heard about postpartum depression kind of transitioning into anxiety. And so, I would love to explore that a little bit, but Caitlin, can you share your story with us?

Caitlin Goodrich (Caitlin): Absolutely. I am struck both by the similarities and the differences between Leticia and Elizabeth and my story, and I think that’s part of the proven thing about postpartum depression that’s so interesting is how it can manifest so similarly and show also differently. So, for me, it was I think part hormonal and part like mental health and transition related. So, Clark was born in April and it wasn’t actually until nine months postpartum that I really recognized and started to feel what I could name as postpartum depression. I felt like I had been prepped through my doula, through my classes for something I thought would show up within the first few months after postpartum or after Clark was born and it didn’t for me. So, for me it was when we actually finally sleep-trained him, which don’t wait until nine months to sleep train, but it showed up at nine months because I stopped breastfeeding as often and I think that kicked off a series of hormonal changes that coincided with me being back at work for about three months. And I was feeling like, “Oh no. Everything that I thought was okay isn’t okay anymore.” And so, it felt confusing because it was late in my head. And in general, people kind of had stopped checking in. So, the questions about how it was going and how I was doing had stopped and the external triggers to evaluate were fewer. I also internalize a lot. So, I put a lot of energy into making sure that things looked okay from the outside and I’m pretty good at that, which is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it let me keep functioning pretty well for a while, but I also added to this like sadness and isolation that just was compounding over time because from everyone else’s perspective, I was doing fine and things were the way they were supposed to be. So, similar to what Leticia mentioned, I think for me, postpartum depression really showed up as if I think instead of me being the cloud, I feel like I was walking under a cloud all the time. Everything was muted, like joy, humor, excitement, and honestly even sadness to a certain extent, like I just didn’t feel things. And Clark is such a joy and there are so many good things in my life and I just realized I am dragging myself around and coping, but I feel lonely and I feel sad all the time. How do I get out of this even if it’s so much later than I thought postpartum depression “shouldn’t” show up.

Jen: Yeah. I guess I’ve always thought that it was something that happened pretty quickly, but it sounds like in the three of you, in your experiences, it was a little bit later, but I don’t know if that’s common for people.

Elizabeth: Yeah. So, in the work that I’ve done with my doctor and my therapist, they both have said yes and it’s very wide-ranging. If you think about it like trimesters, it’s like the pregnancy continues even after the baby’s here and so with it so does some of the trauma and just the adjustments and I’m no medical expert by any means, but Caitlin touched on this and it’s true from what I’ve learned from my doctor, which is that postpartum depression can be both physical and hormonal. It can also be situational. And in fact, most of the time, it’s a blend of the two. And so, just depending on what that hormonal balance is like right after birth and delivery, some people may experience it a little bit closer. Like from the beginning, I kept saying I’m like, “They say everybody has the postpartum blues and from the get-goes, like I’ve got the purples. Like it’s something that’s like, way deeper blues, but I don’t know what it is. But in terms of when it really came to a head and felt like

it was incapacitating, it was much later in the journey for me. But the other thing I want to point out that my doctor also said to me, there's a lot of stigma around postpartum depression and when I was diagnosed with it, my first response to the doctor was actually, "No, I don't have it." And she said, women in corporate America often times are disproportionately affected by postpartum depression but are the least likely to do anything about it because we tend to just try and muscle through.

Jen: Leticia, I wanted to go back to you and explore the anxiety, the postpartum anxiety, that you talked about.

Leticia: Sure. And I think what I was lucky to have, I was lucky to have a husband who was home for quite a while after Daniela was born and I was also lucky to have my mom in the house. What's really interesting is I feel like I had a little bit of an out-of-body experience for probably the first year with us because that's my cloud phase, right. So, it's the phase where I couldn't hear it, I couldn't, my husband was like, "You're crying a lot. This is not okay. You know, we can get and use some help." My mom was like, "Well, you know you're very snippy and you're kind of not being yourself. You're being rude. Are you okay." And I just, I really couldn't hear any of this, right. And so, I just wouldn't listen and it wasn't because I was trying to be stubborn, it was because literally I was so tired and I was just trying to kind of survive, but it was like if I gave this attention and gave it words and gave it an emotion, it would be very real and I wasn't ready to tackle that. So, I think as I transitioned towards anxiety, it became a "how do I just stay focused, how do I survive?" And I came back from maternity leave, into an amazing role of chief of staff for one of our leaders in the firm and he is such a family-oriented guy and such a supportive role model for me and I didn't even have the words to talk to him about it, right. What I wanted to do was do well in that role and so, that became my focus. It was like how do I do well in this role? How do I do him justice? How do I do my practice justice? And so, it kind of evolved from there and I realized that I was doing well, right. I was high performing. I mean I kept on my journey and I kept going and it wasn't until there was silence that I started to realize that when I had silence, my brain was actually spiraling. So, I had moments when I was driving and I would start to feel like the cars next to me were going to run into me and then not only were they going to run into me, but they were actually going to push me off this bridge. And how do I get out of the car if I got pushed off this bridge? So, I would have these, what I would call, almost like whirlpool moments in my brain. And it was impossible to get myself out of it. The only way to get out of it was to distract my brain with something else. And I would say, Jen, that that's when I realized that all of the planning that I was doing and all of the attempts at focusing and all of the attempts at just trying to keep going were attempts at avoiding silence and avoiding silence with myself, and the lack of being able to give my feelings words and name it was avoidance. And then, I went to Norway last summer. My brother was getting married. We both took the kids and all the stuff and it was, I think Elizabeth, you mentioned it and Caitlin did it too, it was, "this is a happy moment. I am not happy. Actually, I feel nothing," right. What's the next thing I've got to get done?" And so literally, every moment of my life was like "I recognize, I acknowledge, and I move forward." So in December, when I had the Christmas break, December of 2019, so Daniela will almost two, I told my husband, "You know what, I think I'm ready to listen, I think I'm ready to talk about this now, and I don't feel okay." And then I talked to him about the moments that I was having when I was driving, the moments that I was having before I went to sleep, and just spiraling that my brain would go into and it's not like I was crying in those moments, I wasn't having an outward panic attack. It was all inside of me. And that's why when we said "Okay, you know actually I think that we can't handle this on our own anymore. You know, you can't keep looking like this, and let's do something about it." And I think it's going to be an ongoing journey for me, Jen. I don't

think this is going to stop, right. I mean, this is something that for me, I think I'm going to have to always try and understand my triggers and try and understand, like how to calm myself down and how to communicate about it.

Jen: Yeah, thank you for sharing that and I think for many people, it's an ongoing journey and those of us that struggle with our mental health, regardless of what it is, we don't wear a blinking sign on our head. And so, we struggle internally. So, Caitlin, how did you decide to share your story and what made it feel right to start talking about it?

Caitlin: Yeah, it took a while and sort of an external annual tradition, I'm going to say, forced me into it. When I was in the thick of it, the group I told was very small. As I shared, my coping strategy was to internalize what was going on and to make it look like everything was okay while at the same time just implicitly begging for someone to notice that it wasn't, which is the exact opposite of how life works. And so initially, I really just shared with one of the leaders on my project who I was close to. She had coached me through her experiences returning to the firm after her two kids were born and had shared elements of her experience that I knew she would recognize kind of what I was going through and what I needed. And her support was critical, just because to me I think it's important that I feel seen, and so she was able to provide that for me. Similarly, one of my mentors who also had similar experiences with returning to work and trying to navigate how to do this with kids, she was one of two people at the firm that I confided in initially. And then even in my personal life, I think my husband was aware of everything that was going on. It was a couple of months before I told my parents and really I felt like I needed to tell people more so that I didn't continue having these walls up that people couldn't get through. But we send a very newsy letter at Christmas every year to about 150 people and the list grows every year, to talk about what's going on in our family, and share pictures and it's like a physical letter. So, we write it around Thanksgiving every year and I remember thinking, "Okay, this is the moment. Either I'm going to write about what's really happened this year or I'm going to skip it." And I just knew I couldn't skip it and feel good about that. I didn't want to just share the good stuff that was going on without sharing what was really happening. So, I decided to write about it in that letter and then snail mailed it to 150 people, which includes a big group of professional folks at Deloitte, people in my personal life, and was aware that for some people who I'm pretty close to, it would feel strange to get a letter that they know goes to a lot of people to explain this big thing that had been happening to me and for others that we aren't super-close to, they would be like, "Wow, that's a lot to share!" But I just figured I needed to take that moment to do it and it was really gratifying. Folks I work with would come up to me in the next couple of days and say, "You know, we got your letter. Thanks so much for sharing," or I would hear stories from them about their wives or themselves or their people in their lives who had experienced similar things. And so, it was nice to see that and then to also kind of recognize who was comfortable engaging with that content essentially and it told me kind of who I could lean on in the future as I needed to.

Jen: Elizabeth, you touched on this and I think a lot of mothers fear that if you do have postpartum depression you get diagnosed or anxiety, it means you can't be high performing and then it could impact your career. So, what are your thoughts on this based on your own experience and then things that you've seen because I know that you've become quite the inspiration in pillar in our firm around this, which is so cool.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Well, so the first thing I would say, which is probably my biggest learning from the entire 18-month journey that I had with postpartum depression is that being broken and badass are not mutually exclusive. And so, during one, at the height of my postpartum depression is the one of the hardest years of my life. Full stop. That was it. I also had the best performance year in four years at the firm and I have no idea what that means, except for perhaps a gentle reminder that just because somebody wears something well, you might wear trauma well or grief, whatever, doesn't mean that it's not heavy. And so, that was something that stood out to me and when I think back on the journey when I came back from maternity leave, I think I felt like I needed to get back and prove myself really quickly before I could ask for help and it's interesting because also, shortly after I came back, we did a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Boston so that we could get back close to family and get me some support. And as we were leaving, somebody gave me a journal and the journal on the cover said, "Bloom where you're planted." I remember looking at it and thinking about how I felt at the moment and I was like, "I have zero energy to bloom. In fact, I actually feel like I'm withering right now." And that slogan started to feel like pressure until I remember we were on the plane and I'm like, got a kid on my lap and I've got my Internet up and I'm like doing some research and as a whole, the word dormancy just came to my mind for some reason. And so, I started like looking it up online and was like, "Oh my gosh, dormancy is this period of time that a plant pauses growth to protect itself from adverse growing conditions or sometimes just recharge for the next bloom, and while it's dormant, there still life at the core and that plant is actually rooting deeper in it and here's the thing, nobody throws the plant away while it's dormant because it's already proven itself and we know exactly what we're going to get in terms of beauty and comfort when that plant reblooms." So, there's nothing in nature that blooms all year, neither should we and so instead it became this model for me to be gracious to myself whether I'm in a mental health episode or whether I'm in a healthy typical state and to remember that dormancy is the difference between being buried and being planted. And so, I went to my PMD at that time with that exact analogy. I was like, "Dana, you know me. We've been working together for four years. Like this is a dormant period for me and I need you to give me some aircover while I find my way back, but you know when I do, you know what you're going to get." And so, that became such a powerful anchor for me and that I still use even now and so encourage people to hang on to that.

Jen: Yeah. And I think that's what inspired your blog. Is it not?

Elizabeth: Yes. It is. It is. So, I do. I've got an online blog and at first, I started writing about the experience because it was cathartic. Then, the number of women, Deloitte women, who reached out to me either after finding the blog or somebody referring them to. It's how Leticia and I became friends. Caitlin and I got to know each other through a reference, through the blog. It was unbelievable to meet a number of women who reached out to say, "Hey! I've had a similar experience. I knew something was wrong, but I didn't have language for it. Thanks for talking about it" or even some other people who were in far worse shape and their safety was on the line and I realized how powerful of a tool it is for us to share our stories because we are destigmatizing it and allowing each other to ask and get the help that we need and also I think we're all trying to figure out this thing called life. And so, for sharing our stories, we're all writing a chapter in that survival guide. So, that to me it has become, it's morphed into this kind of community for my motherhood journey and I've appreciated that because it was nothing like I had ever seen on social media, which was like these beautiful gender reveals and like these really like skinny moms right after their pregnancy. I was like, "Wait! what is happening to me. This is not real, like anything I've ever seen."

Jen: Kind of staying along these lines, Leticia, what's one thing that you would want leaders and colleagues to know? How can they support employees in general that are navigating through their mental health and well-being?

Leticia: Yeah. I think there is really two big things, Jen. I think the first thing is we really have to look at what our people are working on, what's on their plate, specifically in consulting where we've got high-stakes client service roles, important relationships to build, and at different levels. You feel different pieces of ownership of the puzzle, but that's a really critical puzzle, right. So, how do we kind of build that trust, build that relationship, manage projects, but then also develop our people in our firm and it ends up being a lot. So, one of the biggest takeaways for me is, I am one of those people that will just keep taking things on, right. As I came back from maternity leave, I've sponsored a dog and adopted that dog. So, why not? I am transitioning. I had at that time a two-year-old baby. Let's add a puppy. Go for it, right. So, I would just take more on and it would be a question of I can keep doing this, I can keep doing this, I've got this. And so, taking a look at what are people doing, is that value added, is it critical right now, what can we help them prioritize, what can we help them stop, how do we find what truly energizes them, what truly strengthens them, and help them focus there versus everything that they're thrown into. So, I think that's one big ask that I have of just leaders and that's an ask that I've taken on for myself of my own teams. Do you really need to be doing all of this? How can we counsel ourselves out of some of that?

Jen: I call that having the courage to do less.

Leticia: So much more elegant than what I just said, but that's exactly right. It's okay to say no. It's okay to say no, it's ok to say I actually don't think that I can take this on and do it justice. And that takes not only courage, but it takes the support system to do that. I feel that some of our more junior employees and practitioners are worried to say no. So, how do we stand up and say, "I'm actually going to proactively work with you on this and take a look at what you're doing or where you're spending your time." That's one big ask I have of all of us. And the second one is conversations like this. It's just sharing your story. Both Elizabeth and Caitlin have mentioned how when they shared their stories, it actually had a really big impact online and I wasn't ready yet to tackle my own story, to tackle my own journey and that's okay. But the more we talk about it, the more we share not just postpartum, but well-being examples, and share what we are doing for ourselves. The more transparent we are, I think we just create acceptance and we destigmatize well-being and mental well-being. So, that's something I've taken on with my team. And my team joked that sometimes I should start like a mommy blog because I share that my house today is chaos. Just bear with me. And my son will come in and have to sit on my shoulder and cry while I'm getting on a call. And all of this happening. It's messy. I also share what I'm doing for myself. I share my therapy time. Like guys, this is therapy for me, Fridays at 1:00 PM. Please don't schedule over it unless you absolutely need to and come talk to me beforehand. So, I try as much as possible to show them that to be successful at the firm, you have to take care of yourself as well.

Jen: You're speaking my language lady. I like it.

Leticia: We got to do it, right. And we've got to see other people do it too just to make sure that we know there's a path forward.

Elizabeth: Jen, I think there's one thing too that I would add to that. I agree a 100%. I think though you made a point earlier which is that with mental health, we may not always wear a sign, right? It's not like if I broke my arm and I wore a sling and people know to ask me it's okay and I do think there's something that we can do exploring the language that we use. So, for people who looked at my journey or when I came back, they would say things like, "Oh! you're so strong" and while it was meant to be an encouragement, at some point, it actually felt like more of a burden and I didn't feel like it created space that it was okay for me to say that I wasn't okay, it's like I'm so strong not by choice. I mean like I didn't ask for this particular situation. So, I do think that also there's something we can do and that's to signal that this is a safe space to be real and to be okay and everything that Leticia said about how we model that and show it, but I do think language is really important and what we say to people before asking them if they're okay.

Jen: Yeah. I completely agree in giving people permission to not be strong because we're not all strong all the time. We shouldn't expect ourselves to be and we shouldn't expect others to be and we need to make that okay. So, thank you for that. So Caitlin, first of all, congratulations.

Caitlin: Thank you.

Jen: Because I hear that you're going to be on leave soon.

Caitlin: I will.

Jen: With your second. Is it a boy, your son?

Caitlin: It is a boy. Yes, it's a second boy.

Jen: And you are also working towards a promotion. So, what made you decide to go for a promotion given all the challenges in our current environment?

Caitlin: Yes. Good question and when I have re-asked myself after I decided to, although I ultimately feel that it was absolutely the right decision. So, the short answer is twofold. One, I do feel well enough and I think it's important that I start there because I didn't feel well enough for a long time and honestly deciding to get pregnant a second time was also an outgrowth of feeling well enough. And so, I don't want to skip over the part where I acknowledge that I am fortunate to have made a hilly return to something that feels more like myself before I decided to do that. And then the second, I think similar to a lot of people in the firm and in the high-pressure, sort of high-performance environments, I do have a strong bias for action and a strong bias for advancement and I think that I didn't want to take myself out of the running for something just because we had childcare struggles and a pandemic and my pregnancy. And so, I said these circumstances will not dictate the rings I throw my name into and so I have proactively taken on building my case for a senior manager and making the pitches to all of the firm leaders that I need to make before I go out on leave.

Jen: Good for you in a way to control what's controllable, right? We can't control what's uncontrollable. So, I love that. What have you been doing to proactively prepare?

Caitlin: Yes. That has been a major focus of me and my therapist's conversations.

Jen: Yeah. Is there some fear there?

Caitlin: There is for sure and I think it's compounded by COVID and everything that's going on. I'm much more aware of and apprehensive about actually giving birth than I was the first time, which is mainly because in my mind, there's this COVID test. I will go into the hospital, I will take a COVID test even though we're doing all the things that we can to reduce my exposure. If that test comes back positive, I'm in isolation, my husband sent home, and I labor and deliver much more alone than I did last time, and then the baby is going to be in isolation as well. And that moment around that test that I can't control, but will have huge follow-on impacts for me has been really scary, honestly. And so, I've been trying to just come to terms with the reality of that and envisioning what I would need after the baby is born and I come home to rebuild the protections I have in place or just recover from that that could happen, while also keeping in mind that everything could go the way I anticipate it going: I don't test positive for COVID, come home after birth, and it could still, postpartum depression could come back and I still need to think through that. So, one of the big things that I've been doing is staying in therapy and then the second thing is I've been making plans for leave. My husband and I've bought a camper and one of the things I really struggle with is like feelings stuck. I felt really stuck after Clarke was born because there was summer in Texas and I was on leave and I was at home alone and I didn't want to go outside because it was a million degrees and the baby couldn't handle it. I was just like stuck in my house. Admittedly, the last four months of being stuck at my house really helped me through that. In preparation, we bought a camper so I could go somewhere at least and bring air conditioning and a bathroom with me. So, and then the other I think there are two more things I've done. And the third thing is like identifying what are red flags. So, like I mentioned, I'm so bad at answering "how are you doing" when I'm not doing well. And so part of it, like my therapist and I've worked through this, like what are the red flags that I can alert my family and support system too and one of them is that I like start planning and getting excited about things and trying to plan our next camper trip or like what we're to do this weekend or whenever. I stopped doing that. My husband knows that like things are not okay. And then the fourth piece is just like lining up who's going to be here physically so that I've got support for as long as possible after the baby is born.

Jen: So, Elizabeth, I think I have a two-part question for you. If you can talk a little bit about your healing journey and the support that exists for those that are struggling with postpartum depression and then also kind of wrapping into that. We've talked about this a little bit is COVID and kind of how is this impacting or triggering postpartum depression?

Elizabeth: Yeah. So, there's like a wide range of support resources and you kind of got to pick and choose and I can tell you a little bit about what mine was. So, in my wellness plan, there were three focus areas. It was around pain management. I had a ton of physical pain just from the bedrest. My muscles had atrophied. I had no core strength. I couldn't even lift up my kid. So, pain management was one really important aspect of it because it was taking so much energy to just physically work through pain. Second was around mental health and the third was around momentum. And so, for the physical pain, I did months of therapy that was focused on rebuilding that muscle mass that I had lost. I also did

cryotherapy. So, that's like sitting in this CryoSauna where you are immersed in like a cold vapor that's negative 190 degrees Celsius technically.

Jen: Freezing yourself.

Elizabeth: Although I do think I looked a little younger coming out of the chamber. So, it really helped to reduce some of the like pelvic floor pain and inflammation, etc. Then I also worked with a naturopath to test what hormones had been depleted and she was able to see that my DHA and cortisol levels were really low and those control your energy, your sleep cycles, your mood, your stress levels. So, I was trying to drive this car with no fuel. So, she was able to really help me do some supplement therapy that would spur my body back into production. On the mental health front, I did work with a therapist. I think for me, we hire to a profile in some ways. So, our Type A control free. It's like, "Hey! I'm going to be really binary about everything." I was having a really hard time holding space and balancing the good and the bad. So, yes I can wholeheartedly love my boys, I can equally resent what the universe required of me to bring them here. There's space for all of that. So, working with my therapist, I was kind of able to go from past up to present and figure out what are some of these thought patterns that I need to undo and one that I'll actually just quickly mention is around the impostor syndrome. I think it's something that a lot of women battle and what's interesting to me is that I have always been able to, in a state of health, channel that impostor syndrome into extraordinary capacity. This was the first time where it actually felt incapacitating where I was like curled up into the fetal position. So, there's something about a sleep- and a health-deprived mind that I think is the devil's playground and the importance of syndromes that we may carry and how we can use them to our advantage in a state of health. So, that was what a ton of my therapy focused on for momentum. The thing for me was that when you're lying on your back for an extended period of time, inertia sets in and you become sedentary and that's the body's way of maintaining whatever muscle energy, brain capacity whatever you have developed up until that point. If you lay there long enough, you atrophy and that's the process of loss. And so at that point, there's only one way to propel yourself forward or to get momentum and the nurses would come into my room, they lean in, they give me a hug, I hug them back, and then use their strength to pull me up. When I came back to the firm, I felt like my life was modeling that physical state that I was in in the hospital. So, I hired an executive coach and we were focused on present to future, like how do I get my momentum back, right. And she was a guide for me and we got very tactical about what wellness and wholeness would look like for me in a postpartum world, to get me back to that point where I felt like I was chasing my work dreams, my ambitions, and having space to do the motherhood thing with it, like all of them to be dreams and ambitions. So, that is just the steps that I took in my own journey for wellness and to the COVID question, I guess I don't know, it's been a little while that I think I've been in a healthy state. But what's interesting is after shelter in place kicked in, I notice that I had some behaviors that had been coping mechanisms when I was in the hospital started surfacing. So for example, sugar-rich foods and emotional eating started to happen. So, I started to talk to my therapist again. I was like, "Hey!, this is weird. I don't understand why all of a sudden this is happening." And as I'm journaling, I realized that like all the underlying feelings during COVID actually mirrored what I felt during my hospital stay. So, fear, grief, anger, atrophy, not being able to move because life depends on it, all of those were the same things that I felt when I was in the hospital. So, to have those behaviors return this far out of it, that's the sign of trauma, right. And so, while I think last time when I was in the hospital, I was carrying that trauma in my womb and I no longer have one. I became a HysterSister in December, but I do have other carriers and that would be like your heart and your mind and we're not meant to carry this much weight, like to see this type of collective suffering and pain, I don't think we're meant to do that.

So, I think that there are a lot of people who might be revisiting old trauma pathways and there's no defined time horizon like for when that's going to end, like we literally have no idea. So, I think the two things that I would just say whether you're a new mother and new motherhood is isolating as it is and then to add this on top of it or if you're somebody who you find are revisiting trauma, I think the two things are this; however you're responding right now is a normal way to respond to an abnormal situation. So, there isn't any one way you're supposed to feel. Healing is not linear, neither is grief. Allow yourself to feel, it needs to be felt because I think that like pain and suffering demands to be felt. So, I think that's one thing. And then the other thing that was also really interesting to me when I was talking like a friend who is a therapist, she's like our bodies respond to things that we've remembered, right. So, when something shows up and it feels like it's a place we've been before, a lot of our responses mirror what happened at that time. And so she said, during this time, make sure that you pay attention to the difference between what you remember and what you know. And that I think has been really powerful for me, which is to remind myself and reorient myself. I am here, I am loved; my boys are here, my boys are loved; I am healthy; I am whole. Like all of those mantras that sometimes can feel very fluffy, it's actually you reminding yourself of what you know to be true despite the fact that the circumstances around you feel like this other place you've been in. So, I don't know if that's helpful.

Jen: It is. I think everybody on this call or this podcast needed that reminder. I know I did. So, thank you. And Leticia, I'm going to leave the last word with you. So, no pressure.

Leticia: No pressure.

Jen: Share the one thing you wish you could go back and tell yourself when you were first starting to understand your depression and anxiety?

Leticia: You will find words, you can do this, but you cannot do it alone. And I think that for me, as somebody dealing with chronic anxiety during COVID, those words still ring very true. And mindfulness and being present and giving myself acknowledgment, acknowledging what I am feeling is just as critical today as it would have been at the beginning of this journey. So, I think to everybody who was feeling the physiological effects of stress today in this environment, sometimes meditating for example actually gave me more anxiety, but mindfulness and giving my feelings words and just writing down what I was feeling, "Right now, I feel stress. I feel my heart racing. I feel this." And putting pen to paper and putting names to feelings, just not feeling like I have to do it all alone has been a huge saver for me.

Jen: Well ladies, you are amazing. You have inspired me and there are so many people that needed to hear your stories, needed to hear what you had to say today. So, my deep credit to all three of you for being on the show.

Leticia: Absolutely.

Elizabeth: Thank you Jen too for making this a priority in the firm's well-being programs and initiatives.

Jen: I'm so grateful Leticia, Elizabeth, and Caitlin could be with us today to share their personal journeys with postpartum depression.

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