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Interview with Geri Lynn Utter, Medical Science Liaison at Orexo - with marks of wisdom she continues to inspire us all

Geri Lynn Utter is the right person at the right place. As a child of parents who suffered from drug addiction, she, against all odds, became a doctor of psychology, PsyD. A moving story of resilience and perseverance depicted in her first book “Mainlining Philly”. Today, in her role as Medical Science Liaison at Orexo, Geri works closely with healthcare providers and patients in their attempt to hamper the suffering from substance use disorders and severe mental illness and is also involved in the company’s promising venture within digital therapeutics.

	Name:	Geri Lynn Utter
	Education:	Doctor of Clinical Psychology, PsyD
	Profession:	Medical Science Liaison at Orexo
	Hometown:	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania US
	Interests:	Spending time with my husband and two children, traveling and eating good food.
	“Motto for life”:	“You have only failed, if you failed to try.”
	Actual:	With her first book, <i>Mainlining Philly: Survival, Hope and Resisting Drug Addiction</i> , e-book version currently available on Amazon. Hardcopies will be available in summer 2020.

The interview was performed by Lena Wange, IR & Communication Manager at Orexo, in May 2020.



What are you doing at Orexo?

Today, I work in the Medical Affairs department as a Medical Science Liaison for Orexo Pharmaceuticals. Orexo manufactures Zubsolv® for the treatment of opioid dependence. I am responsible for providing education about the disease of addiction as well as in-depth clinical knowledge about Zubsolv® to healthcare providers throughout the US. I am also currently working on research and product development for a digital therapeutic, OXD01, designed to provide evidence-based, therapeutic intervention for individuals who are struggling with opioid use disorder.

Today you help individuals struggling with drug addiction and severe mental illness, but you are also a child of parents who suffered from drug addiction. Tell us a bit about your childhood?

This is a loaded question 😊. My childhood was very chaotic and unstable. Both of my parents struggled with drug and alcohol abuse issues. Sadly, my mother, also struggled with severe depression, anxiety and trauma. There were times when my basic needs such as shelter and safety were unmet because of the wildly dysfunctional and criminogenic lifestyles my parents lived, in order to support their addiction(s). Oddly enough, there were times when life was close to “normal”; my parents made concerted attempts to work on their recovery by abstaining from drug and alcohol use.

From where did you get your incredible strength to come out on the other side as a respected clinical psychologist, today working, from several perspectives, to help people suffering from opioid addiction?

If you read my book *Mainlining Philly: Survival, Hope and Resisting Drug Addiction*, the assumption is that I will succumb to a pre-determined dark fate based on my family’s painful battle with addiction. Though there were many times when I experienced feelings of fear and anger that was inflicted upon me by my parents, I truly feel that they demonstrated love for me to the best of their ability.

E.g. My father talked with me, as a young child, about addiction in terms that I could understand. He said, “Geri-Lynn you don’t want to end up with a monster inside you (his nomenclature for explaining drug addiction to a young girl) if you make the choice to use drugs and alcohol. You don’t want to end up like me and your mother.” In addition to the education my parents provided me at a young age about addiction, a glimmer of light that I was able to cling to, was the confidence and self-esteem that my parents helped to build within me. They believed me, in turn, compelling me to believe in myself because they wanted better for me, despite their inability to provide the life they felt I deserved.

Your very moving story is depicted in your book, *Mainlining Philly*. What does the book’s name mean?

Mainlining comes from street terminology, meaning intravenous injection of a drug, using a syringe, most commonly associated with heroin use. Philly is commonly abbreviated from Philadelphia, the city in which I was raised, in the state Pennsylvania, in the US. The title of the



book is a play on words based on my life-story as my parents and many of my friends were intravenous heroin users.

Access to treatment are often key for those struggling with opioid addiction. What is your view on that?

I agree that access to comprehensive treatment should be more readily available as the manner in which the healthcare system is set-up today to treat addiction is one that must continue to be improved upon if the US truly desires to instigate positive change in the war against opioids and all drugs for that matter. I am a glass half-full person, so from my perspective there is always hope. However, in order to instill hope for better access to treatment for individuals who are struggle with opioid use disorder, education about the disease of addiction is imperative. Through providing education, we can begin to stomp out the stigma associated with individuals who struggle with this disease.

Orexo has recently expanded its business to also include the therapy areas, depression and alcohol misuse. How can they be viewed as closely related diseases to opioid addiction?

Many individuals who struggle with an addiction to a specific category of drugs such as opioids, tend to also have a history of abuse with other substances such as alcohol or psychostimulants (i.e. cocaine or methamphetamines). So, I was thrilled to learn that Orexo is expanding its' product portfolio to encompass therapies that address alcohol misuse. In treating individuals who struggle with polysubstance abuse and/or alcohol misuse, the propensity for these individuals to also struggle with other psychiatric illness such as depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders are significant. To be a part of an organization, like Orexo, who appreciates the need to expand upon its offering within the addiction space into the mental health arena demonstrates the company's commitment to addressing the needs of an often disenfranchised population of people fraught with mental health issues.

During the year, Orexo plans to launch three digital therapies, deprexis®, vorvida® and OXD01. How can they benefit patients?

deprexis®, vorvida®, and OXD01 are digital therapies rooted in evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral interventions designed to offer behavioral health support to individuals struggling with depression (deprexis®), alcohol misuse (vorvida®) and opioid dependence (OXD01). Each of these products offers individuals the opportunity to interface with specific programs developed to offer a level of therapeutic exchange without feelings of judgement or even embarrassment that may inadvertently take place during a human-exchange with a mental health professional.

In what way can you benefit from your experience in your work at Orexo?

In my clinical work, I specialized in working with individuals who struggled with substance use disorders and other psychiatric illnesses (i.e. bipolar disorder, major depression, anxiety, etc.). But



unlike most of my colleagues, my knowledge is not only secondhand, learned from books and lectures. Because I grew up in a family who struggled with addiction, I offer unique insight into the nature of drug addiction from both a personal and professional perspective which has given me the ability to forge mutually beneficial, working relationships with thought-leaders in the field of addiction and psychiatric illness during my time at Orexo. The benefit is also in continuing to advocate, educate, and develop therapies for people struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues in collaboration with the Orexo team.

Today the US is fighting two crises in parallel, the opioid crises and the corona pandemic. How do these affect each other?

The two are strongly correlated. In addition to the concern of contracting COVID-19, a virus that can be potentially life-threatening, from a psychological perspective, people across the globe have been faced with an existential dilemma. Due to the drastic change in every day life from possessing the freedom to dine-out at your favorite restaurant and spending quality, face-time with family and friends to living in a state of isolation and distress takes a significant toll on one's mental health. The past two plus months have evoked surmountable feelings of anxiety and even grief for many people due to the existential trauma we are facing. You take this experience in conjunction with individuals struggling to maintain their sobriety and sadly, what I have witnessed is an increase in relapse. Folks who struggle with substance use disorders tend to exercise poor coping strategies, like using drugs or alcohol, when they experience stress. And, the ramifications of COVID-19 have resulted in a loss of employment, human contact, and for many a hiatus in mental health treatment. Many providers scrambled to implement tele-medicine and tele-therapy services into their practices, however, for many people struggling with co-morbid diagnoses of substance use disorders and other psychiatric illness, even with support, their risk for relapse is substantially high due to the traumatic effects of COVID-19.

How do the physicians respond to this new reality?

As Orexo works very closely with many medical providers who specialize in treating addiction, I have had the opportunity to stay in contact with them via phone and e-mail throughout this pandemic. Prior to COVID-19 they were on the frontlines battling the opioid epidemic. Today, these providers are battling BOTH the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic by giving everything they can to support their patients in maintaining their sobriety, in the midst of such uncertain times. I have witnessed the toll that this has taken on providers within the addiction space and the Orexo US team continues to offer these providers support for their painstaking commitment to their patients.

Finally, there are many children and young adults in the US who grow up under similar conditions as you did, what advice would you like to give them?

"You are worth it and you deserve the best for yourself. Do not be afraid to conquer your dreams and win. Start by setting small goals for yourself and celebrate each and every small goal you achieve. It is much easier to follow what you perceive to be a pre-determined, life path of chaos and instability. However, breaking the cycle of dysfunction, stepping out of your comfort zone and



believing in yourself is much more rewarding. As my dad always told me, when I doubted myself, “You can do anything you put your mind to, kid.”

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About Orexo

Develops improved pharmaceuticals and digital therapies addressing unmet needs within the growing space of substance use disorders and mental health. The products are commercialized by Orexo in the US or via partners worldwide. The main market today is the American market for buprenorphine/naloxone products, where Orexo commercializes its lead product Zubsolv® for treatment of opioid use disorder. Total net sales for 2019 amounted to SEK 845 million and the number of employees was 127. Orexo is listed on the Nasdaq Stockholm Mid Cap (ORX) and is available as ADRs on OTCQX (ORXOY) in the US. The company is headquartered in Uppsala, Sweden, where research and development activities are performed.

For more information about Orexo please visit, www.orexo.com. You can also follow Orexo on Twitter, [@orexoabpubl](https://twitter.com/orexoabpubl), LinkedIn and YouTube.