**Leslie Schlachter:** [00:00:00] Hi. Welcome to the Vitals, Mount Sinai Health System's newest video podcast. I'm your host, Leslie Schlater, a neurosurgery physician assistant. Today I'm grateful for the opportunity to have an intimate one-on-one interview with Dr. Dennis Charney, Dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Health System.

Dean Dennis Charney is a psychiatrist, researcher, scientist. Author leader and has devoted his life to the neurobiology and treatment of mood and anxiety disorders. He's not only committed to researching and teaching resilience, but he's experienced it himself in the most personal way. He went to medical school at Penn State, completed his residency at Yale and Fellowship at the Connecticut Medical Health Center.

Prior to coming to Mount Sinai, he led the mood and anxiety research program at the National Institute of Mental Health. And he was on the faculty at the Department of Psychiatry at Yale. [00:01:00] He was elected to the National Institute of Medicine in 2000, and then Dr. Charney became the Dean of Research at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in 2004, later becoming the Dean of Academic and Scientific Affairs.

Then in 2007, he became the dean of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. He has five children, nine grandchildren, and is known for his love of sports. In weightlifting. I'm thrilled to have him here. Thank you so much for coming today.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Happy to be here.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Do you remember the first time that we met?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I do. If we're thinking about the same thing.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Okay. You wanna tell, do you wanna tell the story how we met?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Well, we're at the, one of the, the crystal party.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That actually wasn't the first time that we met. Oh. We met in the Annenberg lobby during the, like a basketball shooting contest. Okay. And, um. You came up to me and you asked me who I was and I said, who are you?

Okay. And, uh, we kind of got to talking then. I think you liked that I was tall and played basketball, and so I, I think you first [00:02:00] found me then. But then at the crystal party, so

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** at the crystal party, I said to you, um, did you play basketball? Mm-hmm. And you said. I, I won't say the exact language. You would kick my butt.

Yeah. Yeah. I went back to my table and said, she said she was gonna kick my butt. Nobody's ever said that to me before.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I probably believed it back then. Right now I know I definitely couldn't, but, um, because I

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** played basketball too.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Yeah. I think we, we both share the love of basketball. Mm-hmm. And weightlifting.

Yes. Sports is important to us. And so is fitness, right? Yeah. And Bill Bradley is like one of your heroes. What's the word?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yes. Yeah. In fact, when Bill, uh, Bradley played at Princeton, there was a book, a biography is written by him, by John McPhee. Mm-hmm. Called the Sense of where you are. I must have read that book I 10 times or more.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. It's like the Bible. You keep getting more out of it. He was an

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** idol of mine. Yeah. And then of course he [00:03:00] became a nick.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Yeah. Um, okay, so we kind of connected over the love of basketball and fitness and healthcare, obviously. Um, so like in your introduction, you're, you're the dean of the medical school.

What does, what does that mean to people who are, like, what's a, what's a dean?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Uh, the dean at, uh, Mount Sinai Med School means that I'm responsible for the education of medical students and graduate students, and particularly at Mount Sinai, to educate the best and the brightest. Mm-hmm. Who are gonna be leaders.

In science and medicine, I also oversee, uh, the research component of our medical school. And there my responsibility is to recruit the, the best scientists who are committed to making discoveries that change the lives of our patients. And then of course, we have our faculty practice, which provides great care for the most serious problems.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Being a dean of a medical school, is that something that you thought about when you were practicing as a physician or is that something that kind of just evolves and fell into your lap?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** [00:04:00] It fell into my lap. You know, I've been, uh, I'm a psychiatrist, neuroscientist, and spent, um, the beginning and up to the middle of my career of, uh, doing science, you know, making discoveries related to depression and, uh, post-traumatic stress disorder resilience.

Right. And then, um. I was leaving, um, the National Institute of of Mental Health and was looking for another position, and I was offered, this is actually an interesting story. So I was offered the chair of psychiatry at Columbia. Mm-hmm. And Ken Davis at that point was the CEO of, uh, at Mount Sinai, which I didn't know that much about Mount Sinai, but Ken and I, uh, were best friends.

And so I was going back and forth. So I become chair of psychiatry at Columbia, which would be kind of an obvious, uh, thing at being a psychiatrist or come, uh, to Mount Sinai where Ken [00:05:00] said to me, you know, you would become Dean. So I was going back and forth. Mm-hmm. And one of my daughters is a psychologist, and she said, you have the opportunity to work with your best friend.

And I said, you're right. Yep. I'm coming to Mount Sinai.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. 'cause sometimes you just follow your gut, not your head. What do you think are three of your strongest characteristics or traits that allowed you to be successful?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I'm passionate, very committed to when I set a goal and I expect the people around me to be, be committed, be passionate, and frankly shoot to be great.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. I think if you have. If you, if you're committed and have passion, there's not much. I mean, you'll figure it out, you'll get it done, right.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** But you want to be a, a key is that I want people around me who wanna be great, not just good. In fact, when I first took over deanship back in oh seven, I bought a book called Good to Great [00:06:00] by Jim Collins.

Mm-hmm. Very well known book, and I bought it for every chair. Uh, every leader at Mount Sinai and I said, you better read it because if you are not willing to shoot for greatness, uh, you're in the wrong place.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Oh, I couldn't agree more. Let's talk about resilience. You literally wrote a book on resilience.

Yeah. Um, and if you've made it a big focus of your, of your work and your research, what prompted your interest in psych psychiatry and specifically resilience? And how do you define resilience? Uh,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** resilience. It's not a. You know, it's not difficult, um, to conceive what resilience is. It's the ability to bounce back, uh, you know, when you're faced, uh, with a serious obstacle in your life, trauma, disappointment, you know, how do you overcome that and in many cases even become, uh, stronger.

I became interested in resilience with my buddy, my long-term, other best friend, uh, Steve Southwick when we were at [00:07:00] the Yale West Haven VA Hospital. Where I was chief of psychiatry and Steve was overseeing, uh, the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and we felt that we could come up with better treatments for PTSD if we could understand resilience.

So we decided we're gonna study resilient people and we ended up getting to interview and, uh, in many cases becoming friends with people who were resilient. Right. And it changed our life, our personal life.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Is, is resilience genetic or is it a learned behavior, or is it truly only just a direct result of a trauma or a problem?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Resilience is both, uh, genetic and, um, can be based on life experiences. You, you can train yourself to become a more resilient, uh, person. In fact, that, uh, has been the focus [00:08:00] of our research for the

last many. Uh, years. So, but it is partly genetic, but genes are not destiny. Uh, you can train yourself to be more a resilient person.

So then, uh, when you're faced with the next obstacle, uh, in your life, uh, you're prepared.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Would you say that it's more optimism that kind of gives you the groundwork for resilience that maybe you're born with?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It's not just optimism. When Steve and I, uh, were doing our work. Uh, and, and we got to know people from many different, uh, aspects of life, including POWs from Vietnam, right, who we really learned a lot from.

Navy seals, uh, special forces in the Army. People who were born with congenital, uh, disease, who faced natural disasters who were unfortunately sexually abused. So. People from every different socioeconomic [00:09:00] right group based on meeting those people and learning from them. We came up actually with 10 factors that relate to resilience.

Optimus is one, but there, there are others too, right? That are really

**Leslie Schlachter:** important. It's just a part of it. Do you need humility in order to be resilient?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Not necessarily. I mean, humility is an important trait in general. Uh. You need to be optimistic, you know? So if you're too humble, you're not, maybe not, maybe not optimistic, right? No. Uh, so I would say, uh, optimism is a more important trait than being, you know, humble. But of course, being humble is a good thing.

**Leslie Schlachter:** So not everyone can be lucky enough to be optimistic. So what, what's your, what's your advice for those who are resilient? Like, I consider myself a very resilient optimist. Yeah. What's your advice for people like me who are forced to live with or work with pessimists or non resilient people?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** [00:10:00] Yeah. I don't like being around pessimists

**Leslie Schlachter:** people,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** but you can, um, there's a form of therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy and the basis of that therapy, which is used for depression and anxiety problems.

Is to help people see their world in a more optimistic way. So you can, um, you can take a pessimist and maybe not make 'em an optimist, but you can make 'em less pessimistic, um, and, and feel that they can overcome things and be, and prevail, right? So, uh, you can, you can move pe you can move the needle on people.

From pessimism to optimism.

**Leslie Schlachter:** How do you think, how do you feel your physical fitness has played a role in your own strength and resilience?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah, we were talking about the importance of physical fitness and that was important to, um, the prisoners of war who were held in Vietnam, who were held in very small cells.

And, and one of the, [00:11:00] uh, POWs that, uh, it was a real modal, a real role model that when it came to physical fitness was, uh, Lou Mayer and. Uh, Lou practiced the JFK 12 in the cell, got to the point where he could run 24 hours without stopping. Mm-hmm. And he also told Steve, my buddy and myself, when we're interviewing him, that he could do 61 pushups.

Hmm. And I thought, you know, I could do more than 61 pushups. I wasn't that impressed. But then he said, but he probably

**Leslie Schlachter:** wasn't getting a lot of carbs, so

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** No, no. But one handed

**Leslie Schlachter:** Oh, ah. That's impressive. That's tough. That's very impressive. Yeah. So

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** physical fitness is very important to self-esteem and overcoming, uh, the effects of a trauma.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I've gotten to know you really well behind your back as getting ready for this interview. And in one of your interviews you said, um, and we're gonna get in a moment to your, your history with violence. But it's important to you that you're tougher than the rest.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Why? [00:12:00]

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It's important to my self-esteem.

Yeah. You know, that. That I'm a person that, um, could overcome things, you know, that are difficult, uh, that I, I meet challenges, you know, head on. So it, it was important to my self-esteem. And as an athlete, I'm, I'm sure you resonate with this, I, uh, I always felt that I was a very tough competitor. And in fact, there was one, one story was that there was a coach that I really admired.

When I was in high school and he, he helped me and then he became the head of, um, brown University's, uh, uh, uh, basketball team, and they won the Ivy League. And I wrote him a note. This is 20 years after he, uh, he worked with me and I said, congratulations. And he wrote me back. He said, um. I remember you were a tough player.

He didn't say I was a great player. He said I was a tough player. You

**Leslie Schlachter:** just need grit. That's all you need. But I liked, I, I took that as a good [00:13:00] compliment. I would too. Um, so I want, can you tell us a story, uh, about the incident you were shot several years ago. Um, can you share with us what happened and how that kind of helped you on your own continued journey of resilience?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. So now, now, um, it happened at the end of August in 2016. Uh, I live in a town called Chappaqua, and, and there's a, a deli called Langs, a deli that is, um, everybody goes to in the town, like Cheers. Mm-hmm. From the old show. And so I live about a mile from Langs and so I, I left the house one morning and went to Langs, where I got a bagel and c coffee, which I always get.

And I walked out of the, uh. The deli and all of a sudden I heard a loud boom and I was shot, uh, in the right side, upper right side of my, my body. Mm-hmm. And the, [00:14:00] the first thing, uh, so I turned around to go back into the, um, uh, to the deli and it turns out that I was shot on the right side, so I dropped the coffee.

But I had a bagel but held a bagel hand and I never dropped a bagel even though I was shot. Uh, so one of the things we found out, uh, I didn't know it right

away, is I was shot by a former Mount Sinai faculty member who we had terminated for scientific misconduct. I didn't really know, but like

**Leslie Schlachter:** many years before,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** seven years before, right?

Yeah. And I didn't really know him. Uh, but because I was the dean, I, I signed the final right, uh, termination, uh, letter. But he obviously became obsessed with me, tracked me down in my hometown. And Appar, there was actually evidence that for a period of time before he shot me right, he figured out where I live.

Get to know your schedule. Yeah. Knew where I lived. [00:15:00] Yeah. Um, and so he shot me and then, uh. I ended up in, in the ICU here at Mount Sinai, you know, hospital lost half my blood. Um, and I did take it as a challenge, right? 'cause I was studying resilience, but I had never, uh, faced something like that. I, Vietnam era.

But I never went to Vietnam 'cause I was in college and, uh, grad school. So I, I did take it as a challenge on how I. Would recover.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Did you just like pull at your grit and just do your best and be the toughest to go through it? Or did you actively think to yourself, okay, these are the steps of the resilience.

Let me work on them.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I was gonna find out if I was resilient. Right, right. And I felt that was a very important find that out because I had research resilience. I found out that a lot of things that we identified as the prescription for resilience [00:16:00] made a difference. For me. Mm-hmm. Uh, one, I am an optimistic person, so that helped.

Social support is very important from people that you, that really care about you. And I had my family, my friends right away, and the faculty here, right, were very, you know, very uh, uh, supportive. Now you mentioned tougher than the rest, so this sounds totally weird, but Bruce Springsteen, who I'm a real fan of.

I wrote a song called Tougher Than the Rest, and I kept hearing that song when I was in the ICU and I said, I'm gonna be tougher than the rest.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah, I mean, a good title, not so much the lyrics, maybe title. You're right, but the lyrics weren't exactly

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** related to that. But, uh, the titles

**Leslie Schlachter:** right, so. Just for like people listening, resilience isn't necessarily how you deal with something while you're going through it.

It's how you come out the other side, right? Because it might [00:17:00] be, you might feel weak and not up to the challenge in the moment, but really how, what kind of person do you come out on the other side and what major differences did you see in yourself, specifically in your, in your personal life and at work with what that did for you?

Mm-hmm. To continue shaping you.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. So there you're

**Leslie Schlachter:** right. It,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** it. You know, the first couple days after you know you've been shot or other, something else happened to you that was bad. Uh, the resilience comes through as a process, right, uh, in your recovery. And in many cases, you can come out the other side stronger, right?

And better prepared for what else life is going to bring to you. And in, uh, in my case, a lot of that happened. Um, you know, one. You know, when you could have been killed and I could have been killed because if I didn't turn toward my car coming out, uh, the shotgun blast would've hit me, uh, front on and then I would've been killed.

[00:18:00] Right? So you learn to appreciate life, um, in a more real way, in a almost a day-to-day, uh, you know, way. It also helped me become more of a role model. So when I would talk about resilience. I would talk about what happened to me and it would help the people that I was talking to and, and helping them overcome things that I could be a role model.

And, and there was one case not too long after I was shot, maybe a year later, where there was a shooting at Bronx Lebanon Hospital here in New, uh, in New York, in the Bronx. And there was a resident that was shot in the hospital who was more seriously ill. And he was transferred to Mount Sinai.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And I went to visit him.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I remember hearing about this. Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And I, you know, I said to him, I may be the dean, but I'm your brother.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right. You know,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** and I said, I can help you, uh, recover from your shotgun, uh, [00:19:00] right wounds.

**Leslie Schlachter:** So when. We share a, a little bit more history. Um, I did, I was on, uh, the Road to Resilience podcast a while ago about my experience with gunshots and, and, and violence.

Um, I watched my sister get shot to death many years ago, about 22 years ago. And even though I wasn't personally shot, I watched it happen and I ran for my life. And, um, so I know exactly what it's like to have PTSD. Um. Loud noises. Can you talk a little bit about what lingering PTSD you had after the event and maybe even still to this day?

For example, if I hear a loud noise. Yeah. I mean, I just have my startle reflex is not appropriate.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. So I didn't develop diagnosable PTSD, uh, but I had some symptoms. Right. Uh, for a long time I didn't watch [00:20:00] violent shows on tv. Right. Uh, and for a while, you know, even when I think about it now, really, uh, you know, I didn't go out that much.

You know, I went back to work two or three weeks after I was shot, controllable

**Leslie Schlachter:** environment, you know,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** and I gave the white coat speech two or three weeks after I was shot. It was actually the best speech I think I ever gave. But I, you know, my wife and I didn't go to restaurants, uh, you know, for a while.

And like I said, I didn't watch, you know, TV programs that were violent. And when there was violence in the news, it was a reminder. Yeah. Right. But then it turned into something positive and you know, I, I began to think, you know, you know, I fully recovered physically and now I'm a role model. It's made me a stronger person.

Right. And it made me more able to help other people. 'cause I could talk about my own experience.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Only a truly. [00:21:00] Resilient, optimistic person can look at something like that and say, this made me a better person.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It did. Yeah. You know, in fact, two weeks ago, I know the fire commissioner, uh, the, uh, of New York.

Mm-hmm. Um, in fact, because he was involved in providing security, you know, for me after I got shot. And so now he's the commissioner of, and he asked me to talk to the graduates of the, uh, train of the academy. In, uh, in the fire department and I went a couple weeks ago. First of all, it was amazing 'cause I walked in with him and they all stood at attention.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. I say, you're like, oh, I like this. My faculty, I should have does that. Yeah, my faculty should do this.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** But I was able to talk, uh, to these young men and women who were going to become firefighters and they were gonna face trauma. That's just part of the job. And to talk to them about resilience. And to tell them about my own personal [00:22:00] experience.

Right. I couldn't have done that if I hadn't, uh, been shot.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. So I mean, I hate saying we're lucky, but I think you and I probably both had the tools in our toolbox to get through our own traumas. Yeah. Um, there are a lot of people out there that don't have, despite their best efforts, they don't have the tools in their toolbox and they need to harder therapy or more medications.

Now you worked on ketamine for the treatment of depression and PTSD. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. So the work on ketamine is mainly revolved around depression. Mm-hmm. So it, it's a part of the research I, uh, was doing

for many years and it actually started when I was at Yale and the research that we were doing determined that the traditional antidepressants took a while to work.

Right. And they work through mono means serotonin and norepinephrine. And we, we felt that that was not enough, that we needed to look for another [00:23:00] mechanism by which people could get better from depression. And we ultimately, we, and my colleague there is John Crystal, uh, who, uh, I was his mentor and now he's chairman of psychiatry at Yale.

We're still close friends. We felt that it might involve another chemical system called glutamate, and there was a drug, ketamine that affected the glutamate system. So we felt, um, you know, maybe it might be antidepressant, you know, so we had a bit of a theory there. And we did the first study with seven or eight patients where we gave, uh, ketamine or a placebo, and the patients got better in a few hours.

**Leslie Schlachter:** How did you, was it an infusion?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It was an infusion. Mm-hmm.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And it was like a miracle.

**Leslie Schlachter:** And how long did the treatment result last?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Well, the single dose, so this is only a single dose, right? The single dose lasts between, uh. Two to three days.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Okay.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Uh, but to see patients get better so quickly, it was like [00:24:00] awakenings where

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Uh, Parkinson's patients got l-dopa

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And we were experienced clinicians, so we knew this was real, but nobody believed it. Uh, they, they didn't believe in the mechanism of, of glutamate or that you can get better right away.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Also, ketamine scares people. Just, you know, it scared people. Yeah. Back then it did.

Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** So we published it. It kind of just sat there. Nobody tried to replicate it. And then I left jail to go to the National Institute of Mental Health and I said to the group There, we gotta replicate it. So we replicated it. Then all health broke loose with people replicating it, and ultimately we patented it.

And it's now on the market as bravado

**Leslie Schlachter:** how, how often. Yeah. Like let's say, if you can imagine how often ketamine should be used. Yeah. What percentage is it actually used now? Is it still underused?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It's, I don't know if it's underused, but I know it's use is [00:25:00] being dramatically increased 'cause people are becoming more comfortable, uh, with it.

It works for treatment resistant depression, which is common.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And it got approved as a monotherapy, so it's gonna be used even more.

**Leslie Schlachter:** What's the regimen that they recommend for that?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** So it's intranasal and so it's, it's convenient and you take it twice a week so you don't have to take it every day.

That's great. You take it twice a week for at least say, four to six weeks, although you're gonna get better in the first week.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And then the, the doctor will determine, you still need to take it twice a week, or maybe you only need to take it once a week or every other week. So it's different than other treatments.

We have to take pills every day.

**Leslie Schlachter:** And are most providers. Yeah. Like, is this readily available to people getting to the right psychiatrists?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** You have to get to the right psychiatrist who has to be experienced in monitoring. Mm-hmm. Uh, the effects of ketamine, but, but it's, it's now much more available.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That's amazing. Yeah. [00:26:00] Do you think we're ever gonna get to a cure where there's something that maybe like one or two treatments and then someone's cured and doesn't require any more treatments

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** in depression?

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I mean, it's possible. Ketamine is not a cure. You know that, uh, it's not like you take it once and you're, you're done.

You're better. Mm-hmm. So we're not there yet. But going from antidepressants that take weeks to months to a treatment like ketamine, that works right away

**Leslie Schlachter:** and side effects. A lot of side effects. A lot of the medications. Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** But, but the advance of the treatment, taking a long time to getting people getting better in a few hours, you know, that means we're getting closer.

Right. To maybe come up, uh, with a treatment that might be, uh. Curative. Uh, but we're not there. Now.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Are treatments like deep brain stimulation for depression or ECT, are those curable or again, just kind of bandaids?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I wouldn't, bandaid is not the right word. Okay. Um, because you can, real [00:27:00] depression is a serious disease.

Uh, you know, as you know, suicide can happen. So these are real treatments. It's like, um, in, in a way, diabetes. Right, right. So it. Many cases, it can be chronic, but some people only have first episodes of depression and then you treat 'em and they stay well. Mm-hmm. Uh, so the treatments are pretty good. Uh, you know, EECT is for people with more serious depression, it turns out that ketamine is as good as ECT or better.

So now patients that would normally go to ECT are getting ketamine, right? Uh, you know, first the same with deep brain stimulation. That's a more aggressive. Right. Uh, treatment for people who have not responded to other things.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right. My, um, my father suffered from debilitating depression most of his life.

And, um, many years ago when he went through treatment of prostate cancer and needed radiation and suffered a lot of the complications, it triggered hi, another pretty severe depressive episode and. So [00:28:00] many pills, nothing was working and he, he did very well. It's been now 10 years since successful ECT for him, he went through multiple rounds.

PT can really work, changed his life.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** That's great. I mean 'cause it can really make a

**Leslie Schlachter:** difference. Yeah. I will say. But like even being in healthcare, for me in healthcare, I heard ECT and I got nervous like that. Like why are we still doing this? That seems so. Old age, but it's not, it works quite well.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It works quite well and it's safe.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Um, let's talk for a minute about the killing of Brian Thompson, the CEO of United Healthcare, which took place on December 4th here in New York. Um, I can draw some parallels with what, what happened to

you from what you know, um, as a leader of a healthcare institution and yourself being a victim.

Um, what are your thoughts on this incident?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It's becoming more common.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** You know, that, uh. It's become more common that physicians are being, uh, attacked even within hospital, uh, settings. And so when I heard that, I, in a way I wasn't [00:29:00] surprised.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right. Which is awful to feel that way. Right. You know? Yeah.

It

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** is. But more and more people who are, uh, in leadership positions, whether it's in, you know, healthcare, uh, or politics, um, uh, right. President Trump was attacked twice. So if you make, uh, you know, decisions, you know, that are, uh, are publicly renowned or known better yet, right, that you can be at risk and you gotta be careful.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. And it's like you said, like the buck stops with you. You didn't know this guy that shot you, but you signed off. And ultimately it's like the buck has to stop with someone. So that's where people might put their anger.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** That's right.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Exactly. So this is not surprising to you. You gotta be careful. Yeah.

Um, back to the healthcare providers that you work with, what do you, what do you think are the most coveted or important qualities in the healthcare providers that you work with?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Dedication to their patients. Uh, empathy in terms of what the patients are [00:30:00] going through. Patient needs to feel that you really care about them.

Mm-hmm. And great skill. That a, a great physician, let's say physician, but of course it could be other. Mm-hmm. Clinicians makes all the difference. If you have a serious disease, you could go to one place and get mediocre care and maybe you don't get better.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And you go to a great clinician, you could be cured,

**Leslie Schlachter:** right?

It's a big difference. So you wanna go to the

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** best place. But empathy in terms of personal characteristics, it's dedication and empathy are very important.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right. Which is, goes back to what you said you think your, your strongest traits are.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Did I say that? Yeah. At the beginning.

**Leslie Schlachter:** What would you, what, from what you've seen, and you've been here for a while, what would you say are some of the common mistakes that healthcare providers make in their practice?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Um, they get tired. Yeah. Uh, they don't take care of themselves. In other [00:31:00] words, don't pay attention to their own, uh, personal, uh, wellness, right? So when they're, that could come through when they're treating patients and that they're not feeling, uh, in an optimal fashion to take care of people. And obviously they need to, to need to stay on top of advances in, uh, their field.

Because, you know, medicine, the discovery in medicine, different diseases is at a very rapid pace now.

**Leslie Schlachter:** React

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** and, and so you can't rely on what you learned in med school to, uh, treat patients with the, the conditions you're expert in 10 years later. You gotta really stay on top of things.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. I mean, being a healthcare provider these days is, is a sport.

It's a sport. I mean, I have to, I have to sleep well, get exercise, be well fed and hydrated, or else how am I gonna see 30 patients in a day? Right? Go to the OR and have enough empathy to make phone calls at five o'clock for people who are mad that I didn't call 'em back at 10, it's exhausting. It can be very difficult and you gotta

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** stay on top of your field.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah, yeah. And it is true. Okay. So truly taking [00:32:00] care of yourself. So generally speaking, people coming into healthcare or starting to feel burnt out, really following the prescription for resilience, which hopefully we can put up at the bottom of this screen. We can put up the link to the prescription for resilience.

Um, 'cause I read through that and I feel, generally speaking, I'm really good at crossing off everything on that list. But it becomes really difficult by like noon on Friday. To keep crossing everything on that list. You get tired. You got tired. You get tired at the end of a week. You

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** work out every day.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I, five days a week.

Okay. Today's a rest day. It's very hard for me to have a rest day. Rest days are the most difficult 'cause I really just wanna go to the gym. Yeah. I, I take

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Monday

**Leslie Schlachter:** off. Monday's a good one. You work 'cause I work,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I, I exercise much more on the weekends.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Do you, you have long, do you have longer, heavier lifts on the weekends?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Oh, now you're getting into my routine.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Kind of. Yeah. I mean, we're here.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I alternate, so I do lift heavy.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And so I will generally alternate, um, uh, days in terms of lifting and [00:33:00] cardio.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Do you do upper body, lower body, or do you do a split?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I, I view my cardio as kind of upper body. Okay. A lower body. Okay.

You know, so my cardio is on the rowing, ach, the rowing machine. Mm-hmm. Or now I have what's called an assault bike, you know? Oh, yeah. Yeah. Which is really good. And then, uh, on the days I don't do that. I do it really, uh, heavy lifting on the upper body.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** A bench press, chest press, uh, uh, rose. Mm-hmm.

That's those sort of, and I have a heavy bag. And do you work out at home

**Leslie Schlachter:** or do you go to a gym?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** You know, for many years, as you may know, I worked out here with the students. Right. And then, and I love that. But then the pandemic hit. And in the beginning of the pandemic, I don't know what you did, but you know what I did is before I built a gym in my house, which I have now, I did the stairs.

Yeah. So I walked up to 25 flags three times, uh, before my, my house had a gym, and so now I have a gym. Yeah.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I did like [00:34:00] pushups and lunges and burpees and I hated every second of it. I just wanted like metal to push. Yeah. Um, so the

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** gym I have in my house, I got everything.

**Leslie Schlachter:** And do you like working out by yourself, not having anyone around, or do you like kind of having the socialization and chatting with people at the gym?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I like it better, you know, socializing with other folks. That's why I love being in the student gym. But in terms of time, right. Uh, you know, I, I work when I come, I work out when I come home, so I can go right downstairs and, you know, get it done. So it's more convenient.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And then on the weekends, uh.

I kayak, uh, with my son, you know, so we're outdoors and we're together, we're buddies.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That's nice. That's really, that's lovely. Well, you were just talking about time. So your tenure is somewhat coming to an end here as the longest serving dean here at the School of Medicine. Looking back, is there anything you wish you would've done differently?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I mean, there, I [00:35:00] wouldn't say major things. You know, the, the major decisions that I made generally worked out. In terms of forming research institutes and changing the curriculum for our med students and so forth. But there's always little mistakes, like sometimes I didn't know, always recruit the right person, right.

Uh, and that sort of thing. But it's been a great run. Uh, it's, it's gonna be difficult. Stepping down,

**Leslie Schlachter:** what advice could you offer folks who are considering or actively pursuing a career in medicines, particularly psychiatry and research? I.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I have no regrets. Um, you know, I, I graduated med school in 1977 and it's never had a regret.

It's such a great field, uh, to be a physician, um, whether you're primarily treating patients, which can be very rewarding. Right. I loved research, you know, 'cause I felt I could make discoveries that not only have one person at a time. Yeah, [00:36:00] but can help a large, you know, number of patients. So, so, but either way, you know, fine.

Um, so here, here's another little tidbit. You know, so when people ask me, you know, how do I decide that, uh, what to focus on? And I say, one, you gotta be passionate about it, right? You gotta have fun doing it, and you gotta be good at it. Now, if you're not good at it, don't choose it. Yeah. So I think if you follow those three things, yeah.

You're passionate, you have fun, and you're good at it, it'll work out.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. I think like, like following your gut making decisions. A lot of people feel like they have to follow what somebody else tells them or their family, what maybe someone's telling them in their head, but really it has to be in your heart.

Yeah. So what does the future hold for you with all this possibly newfound time?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, a lot of people say, well, I'm gonna spend more time with my family. I spent a lot of time with my family now, so that [00:37:00] that's not the reason I decided to step down. I've been doing it for 18, uh, years and I felt that, um, I wanted to leave at the top of my game and so I feel I'm doing that, but now I gotta figure out what I'm going to do.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Mm-hmm. Maybe you'll do leg day. I

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** can't exercise eight hours

**Leslie Schlachter:** a day.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** So I'm working on it. Uh, I'm gonna still do my research. I, with people I collaborate, uh, with here I'm gonna write another book on resilience.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That's great.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And I'm gonna figure out how to have that be an extension of what I've already done.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That's amazing. What, um, what do you think your wife and family expects from you in your retirement?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** One is don't, uh, don't bother them.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. Don't annoy them 'cause you're around more. Yeah.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Now it's, my wife and I are very, uh, she's the best. We've been together, uh, for 56 years. So, uh, us spending, you know, time together is not, is [00:38:00] gonna be great.

Yeah. But their expectation is that I remain happy. Yeah. And, uh, passionate about what I'm doing. That's, that's key to them.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah. I think you, from what you said, you wanted to, you wanted to step down while you still felt you were at the top of your game. I think this was a surprise to everyone. They thought we had many more years with you.

Yeah. In this position. So definitely I think you did that. So I'm assuming when you leave here as Dean, either, whether you hand it off to somebody long term or someone interim, there's gonna be quite a sign out. I'm sure. Mm-hmm. You've seen lots of changes over the years of what challenges are for medical students or medical schools.

What do you see in the next 10 years as some of the biggest challenges for medical schools and medical students that you'll want the next Dean to focus on?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Yeah. I wouldn't necessarily see it as challenges there. There's so many opportunities, uh, because discoveries are happening all the time. Uh, so the opportunity in a way, a [00:39:00] challenge and an opportunity, you know, the, the rate of new knowledge is, uh, gotten faster.

And so in training the, the next generation, both as medical students and, and re residents, right? And, uh, having make sure our physicians in general are staying up to date, right? Uh, that's the challenge. The opportunity is we're discovering great things that we're doing a lot bettering. Taking care of cancer patients and heart disease and neurological and psychiatric diseases.

So, um, opportunities and challenges go together.

**Leslie Schlachter:** So going back to what you recommend for PR providers, which is, you know, stay curious, stay educated. Yeah. Keep learning.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** And luckily we have things like chat, GBT. Yeah. Um, smart smartphones. You know, when I was training, we, uh, we didn't have any of that.

**Leslie Schlachter:** We carried like giant books around in our pockets because I didn't have that either.

We had the Washington

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Manual.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Yeah, no, I mean there, that's, that's the issue is they're, they're lucky these days, but [00:40:00] there's also a lot more they have to learn. Like when you went to medical school and even when I went to PA school, there was no, like, we didn't talk about brain computer interface or artificial intelligence or even have apps like that wasn't so now, then they have to, it's a lot to learn how to use all of that, but

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** that, but that's gonna be fun.

Right? And the ability to, uh, learn a lot more. That's where the opportunities are.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Right. Let's talk for a moment about failure. Yeah. Looking back at your career or your personal life, right? What would you say maybe was your biggest failure?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Okay, Randy. Regarding my personal life. You're gonna like this one.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Okay. Uh,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I still remember there was a game in high school. It was the situation you didn't dream about. We were down by one. Oh, no. With like 15 seconds to go. The play was for me.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Hmm.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I, I went up.

**Leslie Schlachter:** What position did you play?

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** I was the point guard.

**Leslie Schlachter:** Okay.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Okay. So I still, I remember the move I made. I had a pretty clear shot and I, at the moment, the key moment, I couldn't decide whether to [00:41:00] bank it or swish it.

So

**Leslie Schlachter:** you flubbed it? I flubbed it.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** Oh, and we lost you always bank. And for, for years. For years. This, this is actually true. For years, I had the feeling that when it came to crunch time, not only in sports but in life, I wouldn't succeed. So it took a number of, yeah. Um. At times when I did make the last shot or succeed, you know, in facing things, until I got to the point where I said, you know, I am clutch.

Yeah. But that was bad in my junior year playing Oceanside. So that was a big, that was big. I could still remember it today. What about in your professional career? So in professional, uh, you know, career first, I tell our faculty often that if you're not failing, you're not trying hard enough, particularly in research.

That you need to push the envelope. And, uh, that's how you make great discoveries through failure. Right? And in my case, the reason that we [00:42:00] ultimately went to glutamate in the, in the discovery of ketamine is because there were a lot of experiments when we were focusing on the different hypothesis, uh, that it failed.

And by understanding that failure, we ultimately came to, yeah, a big success.

**Leslie Schlachter:** I like the phrase, um, you never lose. You either win or learn. That's a good, that's good. Yeah. What do you see as kind of like the new frontier or a new niche in either research or medicine that you think is gonna be really exciting over the next 10 years?

Yeah,

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** so I'll make this par you partially personal. Mm-hmm. But it also is a new frontier and that's gene editing that when you've determined through sequencing, which genetic sequencing, which you know, we can now

do more routinely, uh, you're gonna identify genes that guide you. In, uh, what treatment you ought to use hasn't happened much yet, but it's gonna really happen, uh, routinely.

And occasionally you'll find, uh, a person who has a genetic [00:43:00] disorder that you can literally change the gene. Hmm. You'll take out the bad gene and, um, put in the good, a good gene right? In that particular area. And where it's, what's, where it's personal is that. Seven or eight years ago, I lost a grandchild who had a single gene genetic disorder, single gene.

Uh, she was perfect in every way except she had a, um, a gene, which she didn't make surfactin. Okay. You know, which is critical. Yep. For lung, uh, function. So she only lived four months, but she was perfect in every other way. Now we're getting close through gene editing. Gene therapy that to take out that single bad gene and replace it with a gene that makes her fact and she would live perfectly normal life.

**Leslie Schlachter:** How many conditions are there like that where there's just like one gene is responsible for this major [00:44:00] illness enough? Yeah, I would say yeah. And is, but the process is similar of kind of just like replacing that gene.

**Dr. Dennis Charney:** It's, it's complicated, but it's becoming doable and. In the, uh, it's all about how do you, um, get the gene in, you know, that process.

But, uh, uh, now we're, uh, with sickle cell, right? We're able to cure sickle cell in terms of gene editing and the th uh, thalassemia, you know, so there are more and more conditions where. We're gonna be able to do that.

**Leslie Schlachter:** That's amazing. I did not know that. I'm, I'm learning that now. Yeah. Thank you so much for being here today.

I, it was a pleasure spending time with you. I mean, I've listened to some of your interviews and gotten to know you through other people throughout the year, so I feel like this was a real privilege to spend this time with you and hopefully, um, everyone listening, um, can, you can actually go online and search his name.

There's incredible interviews that you can learn even more specifically. I think the, um. The interview that you did to the medical for the medical school where you [00:45:00] talked more about the prisoners of war and your, and your

teaching. So there's a lot more out there for you guys to, to learn about Dean Charney.