

Metta Sandiford-Artest LiveWell Interview

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Wendy Slusser, Metta Sandiford-Artest

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 00:02

Hello everybody. Welcome back to The LiveWell Podcast. Today I am re releasing an interview with legendary NBA champion Metta Sandiford-Artest, originally released in May of 2021. This conversation is pertinent for many reasons. It's not only basketball season, but it's also the turning of a season into colder and darker months. There's a lot of beauty that comes with changing seasons, but there is also a lot of seasonal anxiety or depression, also known as sad, sad, seasonal affective disorder. Metta talks about his own struggles with mental health and the action he's taken to destigmatize mental health treatment therapy and increase conversations around mental well being in the world of sports, where these types of conversations are often being had for the UCLA community know that we have spaces like caps and rise that are tools for your mental health promotion and resiliency. May this season be one a great wellbeing for you and your loved ones. Enjoy. Metta, thank you so much for coming. It's such a pleasure to have you. I mean, the last time I saw you is on campus at UCLA and it feels like a lifetime ago. I've always been an admirer of your ability to advocate for mental health awareness. I mean, that was the first time I actually met you at UCLA you were with a student group and you were presenting and discussing mental health and how crucial it is to destigmatize mental health in particular, in your world of professional sports, and also beyond. And I'd love to hear from you. How did you start thinking about that as an important part of your dialogue?

M Metta Sandiford-Artest 01:55

Well, you know, I think it's important to discuss mental health and just professional sports. And obviously, people in different walks of life go through different things, but I just thought it was important because professional sports, don't often hear people say, different terminologies such as a hero, idol. And it puts a professional athlete on a pedestal, and kind of dehumanizes, the athlete a little bit makes makes the athlete seem unreal, and sometimes the athlete tries to uphold that. And it's just not the case for everyone, at some athletes, who withstand a lot of adversity, and some can't, and at the end of the day, athletes that count human, so they go to different things, it's publicized, and it's, it's a different world out there, when you come from nothing. And then you'll and then you are on TV every day, everyone knows you're you're

famous, and you're trying to continue to build on that character. Or you're trying to figure out how you're going to take care of lots of people, or it changes overnight, literally 19 years of your life or 20 years, it's been different, right? So, so many different things can affect that. When you make a professional sport, from relationships to how you have relationship with your family, to your partner, how do you think about yourself? Who are you? Do you go back home? Do you keep the same friends? Right? So there's so many different things? Well,

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 03:14

You've covered so many pieces of this puzzle that I've always wondered about in terms of people who are, you know, coming from more modest means and then suddenly being catapulted up right to being sort of in a position where people you know, really look up to you, but at the same time, you're also who you are and who you were raised as so how do you feel talking about emotional well being up front, in a position of an as an athlete? How do you feel that that makes it better for everyone?

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 03:47

Even when you look at Kevin Love and DeMar DeRozan they came out recently saying they have experienced different things, you know, with mental health, it's such a positive thing, we address it. And also not only for the athletes, but even for their fans, people that's watching, they might be going through things you affect the happiness essentially of millions of people watching you. And out of the millions is watching you, you know some people are going through different things and I can connect. It's just such a it's such a positive thing for people to support. You know, back in the days they didn't really support anyone on mental health and sports, mental health issues and sports. Now wishing we can do terminology mental health to get such a bad rap. So I always pause in between that because it gets such a bad rap because mental health that doesn't mean a negative thing, right? Just just mental health right? To be mentally healthy and mentally unhealthy. Well, having different issues. But you know, with that being said, it wasn't as acceptable years ago, you come out as an athlete and you say I'm having problems. Look, they look at you as weak. But I see that as strong. I see that as you actually strong because you have the courage to come out publicly and address your issue and you have the courage to improve on yourself. Whereas the flood just didn't get it people when I came out and telling people I need help. It was it was true. And I didn't I didn't see anything wrong with it. But it was amazing how many people would laugh at that. I'll be surprised. Like, yeah, one of them was a cause of action. See one? Yes, yes, psychologist wasn't psychiatrist, psychologist. And I was dependent. And I said, I still see a therapist to this day. Because we all we always go into a new challenge. It's always a new challenge.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 05:34

What you're really describing is to be truthful, and straightforward about who you are. And it can give strength to yourself and others as well. My psychology of colleagues always describe to me how our moods are a continuum. And many of us move from, you know, feeling content and happy to being maybe a little bit sad, or even a little bit depressed, but still functioning and doing okay, and so if you can address that, in that stage, you might not ever ultimately become seriously depressed. So by talking about the need to talk about your feelings, is a strong and

powerful step to take and especially for people like in your role where you are, like you said, many people look up to you 1000s And, and hundreds of 1000s. And to have that strength, how do you feel about that role that you've taken on because you really have been a powerful voice in this movement of professional sports and motion, well being and not even perfect people that aren't professional sports, but your fans are just the run of the mill kind of person like me.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 06:52

It was just something I wanted to do. Give back. I know, so many people helped me over over my career. So and then I think when I did come out, it was a couple of things that put me on in front, it was probably my career, my fans would have seen me play for a long time. Pretty good player, the intuitive stage that I was on when I was at the biggest stage would have been the most vulnerable. And I thought people needed to hear that. And that was at a time waiting for any social unrest, or it was 10 years ago. But it was just like, even 10 years ago, people were still going through things. It was different. But people were still sentient, don't do different things, collectively to. So I'm assuming people was like, wow, I need help, but probably not pursuing help. I mean, people just not pursuing help. Because it's like, you know, I can handle it myself. I'll get through it. But imagine, even if it's small depression, or small anxiety, small doses of depression, just imagine going through a small dose of depression or anxiety for a year straight by yourself. That's really difficult was really interesting. Nowadays, we have so many resources are essential, we essentially have it easier because what did they do back in the caveman days when he was depressed?

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 08:12

Boy, Well, speaking of the cave, a lot of people are likening the pandemic, as many of us have been in our cave. And some of us might have a hard time getting out of the cave as life goes back to what might be our new normal during the pandemic. Many people I think, who might have been at this level, many people have dropped to another low or a little bit lower than they were before the pandemic, suffering not just from emotional well being issues, but substance abuse, even suicide, some people have been, especially among the youth. And so I'm wondering, what would you tell these people at this time, the ones that are suffering right now, what would be your wisdoms that you'd like to share with them?

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 08:58

You know, time heals. You know, I think Powell just saw actually tweeted something or posted something one time that talking about the passage, the history, I mean, pass is in the past was history, you know, now as the president, and in the future, he really can't control the future. And today now as the president is actually a president, because it's here now he, he referred to it as a president as a gift. Now, some people are going through some tough times. But if you can master the present, I think that's really, so that's amazing. And a lot of people have mastered being in the present moment. Even being in a tough situation. In the past, could have been yesterday, it could be 10 years ago, a year ago, or it can be for the last 10 years. But being in the moment, like okay, I'm gonna just enjoy myself today. I'm gonna work hard and do what I have to do today. It should affect outcome in the future. Whatever you can enjoy today, try to enjoy it, whether it's a meal with your significant other or your brother or sister, or there's

a book or whether it's going outside during the pandemic, a lot of people wasn't going outside, I would say I enjoyed it, enjoy the moment, definitely enjoy the moment, as much as you can It's really something that you can control in and do for yourself and others. And being in the moment is something that you can control. You can't control the future or the past, that's really powerful. And what have you experienced or observed in that area of reflection and positive action, sort of like what you were just saying, with the being in the moment It's really difficult at times, you know, but when I do stay in the moment, I have such a better day, you know, stress, and then people don't realize that, and maybe some people do. I know doctors do it, they do research on it. But stress causes all sorts of issues. Now, I'm not saying don't be stressing, if you're going through things, but it causes so many issues. And literally, you can't really affect what happened yesterday, you just can't there's nothing you can do the fact you're having yesterday, somebody told me a long time ago, and I didn't get it. And I'm a big shooter, what a kind of person I'm gonna. Because it's things I work so hard for as a child being in the present moment, that helped me become a professional basketball player that I wanted to be. But then along that journey, there are certain things I wish I would have done differently. But as a child, I wasn't thinking about what I would have done differently at 6 years old, or when I was 12, what I would have done differently. I'm like no, I know where I want to go. And today, I'm going to work so hard. I'm going to play basketball all day today. Without even I know what I want in the future. But I'm not worried about what's going to happen in the future. I'm just, I got one goal is to make a pro and have fun today. And we forget about that. It's really hard to master that and to get that back. And that's one of the reasons why I'm back in therapy also. Because I wanted to kind of recapture that moment. You know, when I was a child and just moving forward and having a good time.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 11:56

It's really powerful wisdoms that you just shared with us to be so focused like you were as a child, and look where you got you. Yeah, and I mean, that's pretty something.

M Metta Sandiford-Artest 12:11

Yeah, yeah. No, I know, right? It's like really interesting. Yeah.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 12:15

Being in the moment and not regretting the past and not worried about the future. But really, you know, knowing what you want and just focusing. It's really powerful.

M Metta Sandiford-Artest 12:25

You can't, you can't control it, either.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 12:29

That's right. Yeah,

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 12:30

You think you might control your future but really, you don't?

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 12:35

That's right. It's so true.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 12:37

You can do something today that can affect the outcome, and you can really enjoy what you're doing today. And it's not that it's not easy, right? It's not easy. But um, you know, today, like if you wanted to, you can pick the best apple pie today, if you want to create the best poetry right now, if you really wanted to three day, take some time to yourself, right? Go to the beach, call, call your parents today, if you haven't, right? If you and these are things that I'm speaking about, and I'm, I'm still trying to get to a different level in my life. Right. And it's things I don't always do. But it's, it's great thinking about the present.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 13:13

Your working with your therapists in a way is showing how you continue to work in the present to meet your goals. Yeah, and it shows I mean, there's no question that we use this phrase Eudaimonia living a life of meaning and purpose. It's identifying your strengths and working hard at them, and then you will be content, whatever you choose to do. And it's the opposite of heat. Donia which of course is where people are just trying to get immediate gratification, which is not what you're saying. You're saying you're working hard to get somewhere that will bring more meaning and purpose to your life.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 13:56

At the point I'm at in my life now is more I would say. I mentioned like a lot of business but as we know so many people that you guys we get older we get into business, but sometimes it becomes overwhelming. Or we get into so many projects and different things that we forget to enjoy about yourself and your soul not even just your your your spirit, your emotions, like how are you treating yourself and my therapist actually told me this UCLA therapist actually asked me to use UCLA was actually struggling with you know, you know, being the president and then giving yourself positive feedback I was really interested in I was sick because it's like, I'm such a shallow water kind of person. And that means I'm beating myself up all the time because even my awards I have a NBA Defensive Player of the Year. I have a championship ring all star parents, couple first team all different MBAs and I've been suspended as people know I've been suspended to suspend it to all my Korea. So a couple of those years I missed out on the woods and I was clearly going to recede. And then a year after the I got in trouble, I left and right in the middle of receiving more woods. I don't know what was going on in my head. I'm being and then at that time, it's on an issue. But with that being said, now my career is over. Now, I don't

have the total amount of awards that I wanted, which is supposed to be tons of them. And I beat myself up. So I gave away some of my awards. I couldn't like look at these awards. On my my reign, championship ring and raffle that was a good cause. But it's not, it's not with me, instead of enjoying it, and cherishing it like, yeah, it's a great thing, you have a Defensive Player of the Year award you have, you have a war All Star parents one, but you have one, be grateful for that like, like, sometimes pat yourself on the back, without worrying about what you don't have or what someone else has, you know, like, treat yourself. Nice, treat yourself nice the way you want to treat others, some people go out the way to treat others nice. And when they get home, they don't treat themselves nice. I was like, Wow, that's so interesting. And but now that's something once again, that's a new, a new challenge that I have, that's not going to happen overnight, when I was first going down this path. But anger management didn't happen overnight, it took a long time to like, really hone in on that. parenting class, marriage counseling, if you don't go to manage, concentrate and be better tomorrow, right. But I'm really interested in his journey. I'm just patting myself on the back without having a big ego about it, you know, just like more encouragement?

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 16:38

Well, what you're really focusing on which is critical is this whole sense of gratitude. And not only gratitude for others, and what you might have, but also a gratitude to your self

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 16:49

esteem DSL.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 16:51

And it's a point of view. And as you turn in, and you re calibrate your point of view, you do have an opportunity to be more present, because you're not right doing this should have caught up. It's really think a great recommendation for all of us. I know that when I wake up in the morning, sometimes during this pandemic, you know, having lost my dad, I miss him greatly. He died from the pandemic, sometimes I'm always single, would I have to do it? And then I say, Wait a second, hold back, what am I grateful for. And then suddenly, my whole body just relaxes. I say I'm grateful for this. And I'm grateful for that. And I mean, even grateful debrief. You know, when you think about what's going on right now, you having practice basketball all day long. And as a child, now you're practicing something else, I have full confidence that we're, your journey now is going to be so powerful in terms of your ability, as you know, a mindful athlete, that's going to be your All Star ring, you know, you're gonna get a ring for mindful being mindful of and being present.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 18:00

And that's that's a big achievement, you know, if it can be if it can be accomplished is that those types of things I wish. That's why I'm really happy. I really accepted there. Because if I didn't, who knows where we'd be mentally I could have been, haven't gone down the rabbit hole. Yeah, who was spiraling downwards. And with depression, because it piles and piles on,

it's just like, it just piles on. And, and this is data, I don't know how this works. With the brain. I'm not a science major, but I'm assuming you collect data, you collect memories. And it stays there. And then it's something that you're it's, it's already in your it's already there. So and it takes a long time to get rid of it. But that's why I think I really want to practice being in the present. Because eventually these old thoughts can be in a way in the past deep, you know, your brain wherever it goes. I don't know if it's like a cloud, I don't know, we have a cloud.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 18:52

Probably. You know, you're talking a lot about memories, and how, and there are a lot of a lot of children who grow up having memories that are maybe as pleasant or they might not have ever had the chance to see a psychologist and now they're adults. How would you like to see a new world emerge where we can uplift, emotional well being to a point where it's part of, you know, the focus in schools, it's part of the focus in in the community, what would what would be your dream, kind of approach

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 19:31

the economy, we our parents have to work because of our parents don't work? Not gonna have no money. So then, then the parents children have they have to go to school and then go to school not gonna learn. So there's a separation there. So we already are practicing separation between family at early age, because of the society that we chose to be a capitalist society, you know, Learn, Build the economy and Do it at all costs, but just time with your family. And when you look at that, the percentage of time you away from your family is the same percentage of the divorce rate is basically the same percentage. So with that being said, as people, we got to come together and see that parenting partnerships, these type of things should be taught in school, because the parent is gonna teach their child, Hey, be a good boy, be a good girl, you're gonna have babies one day, you know, I'm gonna be a granddad, I'm gonna be a grandma. And these are, this is time that's missing. So, if a parent has never been through a really good case study, or had a good reference point, or how to how to deal with working, being away from the child, and coming home and having dinner, then this child is not gonna learn. So the school system is supposed to be the parent. The school system is supposed to be the parent, not just a teacher, you know, not just organization, not just discipline, supposed to be love, and we need to implement that in schools should be pitches, the families in school classroom, there should be classes on when you get older, young boy, this is how you treat a woman. When you get old, a young, young young girl, this is how you treat a man. Right? When you get older, young boy, this is how you parent a child. And why not embedded in the head now? Why not embedded in them now? Why not? We teach them so many things. And then in school, we teach them math and reading. Because when they get in the real world, we're going to need math, reading and science and America wants to even be better at math and science. Why not be better at parenting, and partnership, why? Why not be better parents in partnership. foundation, the foundation of family, the stronger the family, the stronger, you know, the household, the happier everyone will be families getting together with families. And I'm a prime example of broken family cycles. And, and even when I had this concept in my head, I was going through it. And while I've been divorced once. And even when I was going to our event, I was thinking like this, I already have so much baggage in my other relationship that I brought on where I was like, man, but this would be a cool concept, even though I'm not essentially practicing what I preach. I really wish they would do that these kids could

dramatically benefit from that. And you need people in these positions that think like that, from a point of love and compassion. These are things we need in our school. And this is something I want to do. But I've been doing philanthropy for so long, where I got burned out because even when I was going through all my trials and tribulations while I was playing, I was still doing philanthropy the whole time.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 22:44

I'm not surprised, really.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 22:46

It was like weird, right? I'm like, reckless, but like scholarships and pushing mental health but still going through things that I was fighting inside of me, but still given a lot. It's something I've been talking about lately, I even changed the mission statement to my philosophy, which is parenting and partnerships. So I will focus on versus mental health. And I'm still focused on mental health, but it's like, it's something I really believe in. I believe kids deserve the opportunity to, to have a family. You know, I believe that and they're gonna be so happy with that.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 23:19

Well, I think you're thinking so holistically that parenting and partnerships really is the precursor to positive mental health. Right. That's the that's the point. Right? That you if you have a positive environment where you're being raised, it's going to really enhance everyone's emotional well being and including not only the children, but the parents and the grandparents and, and their children. Yeah, it's like a domino effect. Basically, it's really powerful idea, I think and something that some schools have taken to heart. And wouldn't that be wonderful if we could see this as a major theme as we emerge from the pandemic, which I think we have an opportunity right now, to redefine so much given the fact that almost every single child in this whole country hasn't gone to school in a year. So how can we redefine the sense of belonging and community and an ability to be empathetic and compassionate to each other within the school structure? I think that's what you're really advocating course. Really, really incredible. Sometimes I like to ask this to certain people and I think you I know, you'll have a unique perspective. What keeps you up at night? What worries you or what do you what's on your mind doesn't have to be worry.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 24:47

I think like for the most part, I mean, into my careers. For me, it's my what I'm gonna do next, with the love of basketball. My kids going to college in college, you know, so it's Like, how do you balance? Making sure they Okay, and assuming it's college and working really hard? And then what are you going to do next business? What are you going to do next. And my goal was to and still is to, you know, kind of go company and then kind of take a break. I really like holistic stuff. I really like going out and I don't like working all the time. So it but it's like, how do you stay in the moment, I actually went to the hospital because I was working so hard when so

much, I thought I was having a great time. But apparently I wasn't, you know, because every day I'm into it, making calls into it, but then you become stressed like, oh, wow, I'm actually doing a little too much. You know, staying up to three in the morning, which is okay, you know, and I'm just saying everybody's different. Everybody's built different. You know, so I had to actually create, create some balance. And then I mean, I think for the most part, you know, creating balance between work life, and then your own self is self life and family life, which is really, really challenging. Getting given that time to yourself. Whatever happened, I mean, look.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:06

that's a great word balance. I think that's something that we all strive for. And, and it's hard to create, but it's worth, it's worth working on. Yeah, especially you, you've got so many different interests, and you're such a giver, you know, you have a lovely family. So there's all these different people that you, I even remember you, you know, wanting to be sure that your nanny had access to some to the gym, you know, you you think of everybody you think of everybody, you know, to you paid for a membership for the gym for your nanny. So it's like, you know, it's really, that's a real strength of yours to be so family oriented yourself.

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 26:51

It was also great having a platform like UCLA to actually talk about these things. Because often I was I was on the forefront of a lot of different things from a mental health standpoint, but I never really had a good stage to really present it consistently, and give messaging to someone who can who can make a difference, which doesn't make a difference. And that was such a gratifying feeling to be able to talk about things that I've been doing for years and being recognized for it. And then just given some advice, and input is the greatest thing. So many people want to do great things, and they don't have access to know, to the best foundations, or are the best people doing good things, or they don't know how to approach it. And even though this wasn't like, I wasn't making money off a relationship like we have, but it was super gratifying just knowing that you can tell your story. And you can potentially tell it to a university, who's going to actually try to put it in motion or, or give it back to their students. You know, it's a powerful thing that you probably won't see that but something's happened, pop, something's happening, positive, you know, some student is going on their, their journey and doing something positive. You know, in social working in different things, and a lot of universities are, I see a lot of students is trying to get into social work. And I really love that. I really love that. I think like even a lot of public service workers, I feel like more public service workers should be mandated to do social work, classes, but different things. And then, and so hopefully, social workers get paid fairly and because it's a tough job, but it's such a necessary job.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 28:25

So true. I want to thank you for saying that, that I really feel that your generosity and sharing your wisdom and life experiences, and your knowledge of so many different aspects of our society has really enhanced our ability. And I've written down a bunch of ideas from just this podcast. So just to wrap up, then What good do you think will come out of this pandemic? Why

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Metta Sandiford-Artest 28:51

the pandemic? I don't think anything of it only because so many people pass away. So I think that will be I think the healing process is going to be something that's positive. Because we have so many people talking about Wow, we've been we did so well during COVID. So many people died during COVID. Nobody did well, nobody did well, even though the stocks up and all that stuff, but nobody did. Well, we we lost a million people. So you know, with that being said, the healing process the families that was people, the families that lost people, so many families, I lost, I lost my auntie to COVID and former alumni. So with that being said, remembering it's hard to remember it was so many people dying, it became normal, right? No, it became no ethnic on the end. So you know, is recognizing or remembering, I will say remember, you know, try to remember praying for their families. This is a weird time. And from from personal standpoint, people most businesses, so hopefully pray for the business news and some people don't have the different faiths so you know Wish Well, only businesses, it was just an amazing time. Amazing, shocking time. So. So I'm really coming out of this, just hoping everybody's like, you know, I hope everybody has a way to cope and has a way to get get through this. And, you know, I see, you know, the cities and governments and federal is trying to do their thing, trying to get people back on their feet. So that's good and positive. I hope more free social work and services and therapy services are out there. Because once again, people can't afford it. So we can we can find 1.2 9 trillion. Let's find some, for some therapy. So true. No, I'm really looking forward to the panel. Thanks for having me. It's it's such a great platform to be able to, you know, just like talk about different things that you want to see done in the world. And it just it just really honestly, like has always been so thank you.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 30:54

Thank you, Metta, it's an honor to have you and have your brilliance give us some guidance on future work that we can hopefully support and as we move forward, we are so glad you joined us today in this conversation. To learn more about today's guests, and to explore the entire podcast archive, visit our website at healthy.ucla.edu and find the podcast page under the media tab. If you enjoy this episode, the best way to support the show is to subscribe on Spotify and Apple podcasts. And if you can leave a review or share on social media even better. If you have any guests suggestions, visit our website for the submission form or email us livewell@ucla.edu or direct message us on Instagram at [healthy UCLA](https://www.instagram.com/healthy_ucla). Visit the show notes on our website or on whatever platform you're currently listening to and check out organizations ideas or people mentioned in this episode. Thanks for being on this journey with us. This episode has been brought to you by the Seminole healthy campus initiative Center at UCLA