

About IBD Episode 96

Fatherhood and IBD With Crohn's Veteran Jordan McConnell

The patient advocacy space is lacking the voices of men and especially men of color. The result is that the IBD community is not diverse enough to provide the kind of support that they need.

Jordan McConnell, the founder of Crohn's Veteran, is looking to change the dynamics of the online IBD space. Jordan served in the military and was eventually discharged due to his Crohn's disease. It was a shock and changed his career plans unexpectedly. His disease journey showed him that he needed to be the change and he developed his podcast and his brand to support men and the larger IBD community.

Concepts discussed in this episode:

- [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery \(ASVAB\)](#)
- [Military Entrance Processing Stations \(MEPS\)](#)
- [How to Prepare Yourself for Ileostomy Surgery](#)
- [Parts of the Small Intestine](#)

Find Jordan McConnell on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

Find Crohn's Veteran on [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), [Twitch](#), and on their web site, [Crohn's Veteran](#).

Find Amber J Tresca at [AboutIBD.com](#), [Verywell](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Instagram](#).

Credits: Mix and sound design is by [Mac Cooney](#). Theme music, "[IBD Dance Party](#)," is from [@Cooney Studio](#).

[MUSIC: About IBD Theme]

Amber Tresca 0:05

I'm Amber Tresca and this is About IBD. It's my mission to educate people living with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis about their disease and to bring awareness to the patient journey.

Welcome to Episode 96.

Men's health is an important issue in the treatment of IBD. Many of the voices in the IBD patient community come from women. That leaves a gap when it comes to understanding the journey that men take through diagnosis and treatment, and what their concerns are as they enter into relationships, start a career, and become fathers.

That brings me to my guest, Jordan McConnell, the founder of Crohn's Veteran. As you might guess, Jordan served in the military but was eventually discharged due to his Crohn's disease. But his IBD journey takes some twists and turns between his diagnosis as a teen and his career in the Air Force.

Jordan is a father of a young son, and his life is considerably different than what he expected. However each time he faced the unpredictable, he found purpose and meaning. When he went looking for a space in the IBD community that reflected his unique concerns, he didn't find one. So, he created it...in the Crohn's Veteran podcast and social media platforms

Amber Tresca 1:16

Get ready to take in Jordan's story because it is...an adventure.

Amber Tresca 1:23

Jordan, thank you so much for coming on about IBD.

Jordan McConnell 1:27

Thank you for having me. Amber, I'm happy to be here.

Jordan McConnell 1:30

I really appreciate the show that you do. That's called Crohn's veteran. I'm a fan -- listen all the time. So I feel like I know you already. But it could be the first time that my listeners are hearing from you. So I wonder if you would do me a favor and tell me a little bit about your diagnosis journey.

Jordan McConnell 1:48

Sure. I was diagnosed in ninth grade when I was 14 years old. I was I was staying at a friend's house at night. I had some fast food like that, that for that Friday evening. And we were hanging out playing video games and I got a really, really bad stomach ache. And that stomachache was the worst stomachache in my entire life. And, and it just didn't go away until the next morning.

Jordan McConnell 2:10

My step my stepmother, who's a who's a fertility doctor, you know, her and my dad determined that I needed to go to the hospital. And so they took me to the hospital. And once I was there, the doctors started pushing around on my stomach, and then and he pushed on the, like, I guess the lower right side of my abdomen. And that's where it was hurting pretty bad.

Jordan McConnell 2:29

And based on I guess my reaction, they told me to pretty much strip down where I was standing. And, and they get into a hospital gown with my butt out and everything like that. And then they will be into the operating room, you know, put a mask on my face and had me count back to 10. And I remember I was asking about all the, you know, equipment and everything but, and I'm speaking fast, but that's because it happened fast. It's all within the span of about

five or 10 minutes. I was you know, in surgery and stuff like that. And then I woke up in another room. And my appendix had been taken out and six inches of my colon had been taken out and I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease

Amber Tresca 3:06

Wait, you were 14?

Jordan McConnell 3:07

Correct.

Amber Tresca 3:08

Oh my gosh, I didn't know that. You were so young.

Jordan McConnell 3:11

Yeah, so like, right before Halloween, in ninth grade.

Amber Tresca 3:16

Holy cow. So basically, he saw your reaction either that or he felt something right when he was palpating your abdomen and immediately brought you into surgery. And they probably just thought it was appendicitis. Do you think that's accurate? And then they found Crohn's while they were in there?

Jordan McConnell 3:33

Correct? Correct. Correct. So they found all the inflammation. So I was I was like this gigantic, gigantic scar, you know, on my stomach you know and so I think a lot of people that get their appendix removed, it's a kind of, kind of procedure where it isn't, you know, leave a pretty big mark. But for me, it's pretty huge. Because they didn't know what was wrong. This was more like exploratory emergency surgery to kind of, you know, find out, you know, what was wrong. And then that's what it was since it was Crohn's disease.

Amber Tresca 3:55

Wow, how did your parents deal with that at the time?

Jordan McConnell 3:58

It was a lot of you know, I mean, I remember my mom had come to visit me, you know, from Texas and stuff, and you know, and, and it was just a lot, just a lot for everybody. And I was I think I was in the hospital for about a week I was at a home for maybe a week or two. And then, but surprisingly, I was healthy kind of after that for a while for a long while.

Amber Tresca 4:23

Really So what kind of treatment did they put you on?

Jordan McConnell 4:25

To be honest, Amber? None if I recall. If I recall after that surgery when I was 14, I was not on any medication or any treatment like post-operative post op treatment that I can recall like I literally remember just going back to school like a few weeks later like it never happened.

Amber Tresca 4:44

Oh wow. So then what happened after that? I am guessing that you had no understanding or you weren't helped to understand what Crohn's was and that it was chronic and...

Jordan McConnell 4:57

Yeah, all the all these things were foreign to me. You're correct. And so, you know, I just, you know, I just kind of have almost an abstract knowledge, like an abstract, you know, understanding of what of, you know, the chronic condition of it all. Yeah. And so it wasn't until like 14 years later that I, you know, that I actually got sick. And I've been dealing with, you know, ongoing symptoms ever since. So those are those kind of, so and that 14 years of time. A lot happened.

Amber Tresca 5:26

Yeah, between, between 14 and 28. Right.

Jordan McConnell 5:29

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Amber Tresca 5:31

So take me through. You go through high school. What happens then?

Jordan McConnell 5:35

Yeah, so I graduated high school from Austin, Texas, in '99 I guess I'm dating myself a little bit, but and so but and then I moved back to Las Vegas, and I was at a high school for a couple of years, I was working as a bank teller at a couple of banks and stuff. And my dad was like, you know, kind of kind of put the bug in my ear, but the military and I was just, I was just, you know, at first a little bit, but eventually I kind of saw, you know, the opportunity in it. And I took it upon myself to take you know, this the city bus all the way across Las Vegas and stuff and, you know, and go to the recruiter and stuff and take the as the ASVAB test, I think it's called the aptitude test and everything for the military.

Jordan McConnell 6:24

I did well enough to get into the Air Force. And so the recruiter actually took me to the airport. Yeah. Then I went to Salt Lake City and San Antonio, and all these things. And so I actually did my entire, I did five years active duty every day in the military, in the Air Force. I was a staff sergeant. And then I did a year in the California Air National Guard. And then I did two and a half years in the Nebraska National Guard before I got sick again.

Amber Tresca 6:55

Right. So I have zero knowledge about any of this. So I have lots of questions.

Jordan McConnell 7:01

Sure.

Amber Tresca 7:02

When you were going through the recruitment process, did they ask you health questions? Or did you have a physical exam of any kind?

Jordan McConnell 7:10

Yeah, and MEPS and so it's called MEPS and, and that's what Salt Lake City was. And so, so they, they said they have you, like, do like a vision test, a hearing test. And so they and so, so they asked me about the scar on my stomach. And I was, like, I told them the truth is I that I had my appendix taken out. And so and that, and that, and that was that.

Jordan McConnell 7:32

And then they're like, okay, what's, you know, they'll tell you, they're like, that's a pretty big scar for an appendix and I'm like, well, that was when I was a kid. And they're like, okay, and they're like, Okay, next. So that was, that was it. And so, um, you know, I serve, you know, and I, and I was, because I was healthy at the time I was healthy, normal as a normal guy can be I can, you know, duck walk my underwear backwards, and all these things that they want you to do. And so my and so, you know, all the crazy stories you hear about that physical or true or whatever. And so it's kind of a surreal experience.

Jordan McConnell 8:07

So but yeah, but I was, but I was, you know, healthy enough to join and, and I wanted to join, and I, you know, and I served, you know, all the way up until I couldn't. And then, interestingly enough, you know, I'm about I think about two to three weeks out from if I didn't get sick, I'd be at 20 years. I'd be retiring.

Amber Tresca 8:25

Oh, my gosh, that's wild.

[MUSIC: About IBD Piano Transition]

Amber Tresca 8:42

So what happened though, you started having symptoms again? And then what was the thing that sent you back to or sent you to a doctor? And then what happened in terms of your career at that point?

Jordan McConnell 8:52

Yeah, correct. So yes, I was in the Air National Guard. So I was, I think I was working at like, Cox Cable at the time. And as like a like, tech support rep and stuff and, but also, I was still in the Air

National Guard. So that was, that itself was that was kind of a weird experience, because I would be, you know, cursed out about cable during the week and then people calling me "Sir" on the weekends and stuff like that.

[LAUGHTER]

Jordan McConnell 9:16

It was very funny but and so I think about March or April about 2009 I just started getting I just started getting sick I started getting really bad stomach aches. And so unlike, when I was 14, it was it wasn't just like a weekend, it was like, ongoing kind of, you know, terrible situation. And so it just got kind of progressively worse and you know, I'm or I should say that I'm one of those people that try to resist going to the doctor to the very last minute and so like, you know, I can tough it out type thing.

Jordan McConnell 9:46

And so, and with that being said, I went to the emergency room four times in one year just based on pain alone. And so I got to the point where like, Oh, I can't take any more. I have to go to the hospital.

Amber Tresca 9:59

Yeah.

Jordan McConnell 9:59

You know, Type A, you know, there's no, you know, there's no way this is, you know, unbearable type thing. And so and that happened like four separate times. And so like the third time, I was admitted to the hospital, actually admitted. And I think I had a temporary ileostomy put in, which is kind of like a, I guess a temporary bypass that you kind of eliminate through, eliminating like a like a bag and stuff. And then the fourth time I was admitted, I actually had the surgery, I had another surgery. And so I had another 18 inches of my colon taken out, and then my ileum taken out. The ileum kind of regulates absorption of fat and stuff like that.

Amber Tresca 10:38

So how did that all work being that you were on active duty?

Jordan McConnell 10:43

So pretty much what happened is that I started like, eventually, I was sorry, I started missing drills. I think that I think that that fourth time, I was actually admitted to the hospital, my commander, because this is in Omaha, so all this stuff happened in Omaha, Nebraska, by the way, and so and so am in my military duty was in Lincoln, Nebraska, which is about 45 minutes south, southwest of Omaha and stuff in Nebraska. So my commander, was an African American captain, actually drove up to Omaha to see me in the hospital.

Jordan McConnell 11:17

But after the surgery and everything, and I remember telling him, I, you know, hey, sir, and I'm ready to come back. You know, I can't, I can't wait to you know, finish out my tour, all that stuff. And he was like, you know, he was really supportive and cool, and, you know, nice, and I really appreciated him showing up, and I still do. And so, but I think after that I got like a letter in the mail, saying that, you know, it's been deemed that you cannot be in places with limited medical supplies. And so, which means you can't deploy, you know, you can't be middle of nowhere, and, you know, Afghanistan or whatever, and if that's the case, you're non deployable.

Jordan McConnell 11:52

That's not, that's not good. And so because the whole reason people have IT jobs or logistics jobs, like I did, you know, like, you know, all these bases, the United States is just a practice for when you deploy. And so I wasn't able to do that. And so after that letter, maybe like, a short time after I got an envelope from FedEx with an honorable discharge it

Amber Tresca 12:15

That must have been shocking. Was that shocking?

Jordan McConnell 12:17

It was it was it was pretty, the how anti climatic it was, was pretty shocking.

[LAUGHTER]

Amber Tresca 12:25

Yeah, because so you had this long career and you were valued, but then this didn't warrant I don't know, a face to face meeting or like even a phone call. You get a letter in the -- by FedEx no less?

Jordan McConnell 12:39

Yeah, literally. I mean, so when I left Langley Air Force Base when I was active duty in Virginia, I mean, there was, you know, in fairness, I had a whole going away party, there was a big, you know, poster with like, everybody signed with like airplanes and stuff on it. And like, I got like a silver dollar, and all the all kinds of cool stuff happened. But that was but then fast forward to the end of the Air National Guard in Nebraska and stuff. And it is yeah, I think it was this. Yeah, it was anti climatic. Yeah, just, you know, just literally the certificate, the honorable discharge. That was there. That was that was literally, I mean, it might have been like, oh, yeah, and then maybe my service record was in there, that kind of stuff.

Amber Tresca 13:20

How did that feel?

Jordan McConnell 13:22

It felt like it felt like, you know, I had been laid off from a job type thing.

Amber Tresca 13:25

Yeah.

Jordan McConnell 13:26

You know, like, you know, that instead of having the option to say, you know, I want I want to go and go a different direction myself, like, so we'll make that decision for you. You know, and that's like, that's kind of a bummer. You know, yeah, so, it would have been nice to have been able to say, you know, I'm ready to do something else, as opposed to, you know, kind of being, you know, not given the choice. But I think again, you know, I'm still very grateful for everything that I was able to do in the military life. You know, my, a lot of the things I'm doing right now in my life are directly tied to that experience type thing. So, you know, I'm still grateful. There's just like, man, you know, I wish I could have finished it out.

Amber Tresca 14:01

Yeah, sure, of course. And is there any recourse? I don't think I've known anybody else that's had this experience. So I'm just curious if you even know if there's anything that could be done, because, like, you couldn't continue with a desk job, for instance?

Jordan McConnell 14:20

Correct. I mean, because, you know, I don't know, personally, but I've seen stories in the media of, you know, combat, you know, people that have, been in combat have gotten, you know, limbs, they've been, you know, yeah, like injured in combat, Purple Hearts and stuff. And so, so the guy or the girl might, you know, have it like an arm or leg missing, and, you know, and they're still, you know, like a drill instructor or something.

Jordan McConnell 14:41

You know, so like, so I don't I just don't know, but I think it was, that was that was the reasoning for me. It was that I think the medical supply thing, just being non deployable. But yeah, it's as far as recourse, you know, if anybody, hears this, hears this show and has some ideas and, you know, please reach out to me.

Amber Tresca 15:02

Yeah, I think you're only the second person that I've ever talked to that's had this experience where it was, you know, very quickly diagnosis and then being discharged. And there really doesn't seem to be like a path to discuss it with anybody or to move forward with sort of appealing, like, I don't even know what you would do. But it does seem very, I mean, I get it, like, it makes sense. But at the same time, you had such a long career, and it just seems like, like you said anti climactic.

Jordan McConnell 15:36

Right, right, like kind of his little fizzle. And so it's I would have been, I think, after that time, that I would have been at 11 years before I relisted So, you know? So like, because I listed for four years, and then listed for another four years.

Amber Tresca 15:51

Yeah.

Jordan McConnell 15:52

And then, and then I did the first year. And then I was like, actually, I want to join the Air National Guard, you know, I kind of I kind of want to be able to, you know, explore more of the world a little bit, you know, and so I remember at the time, they said, Well, you can do that. But you know, but since you have three years left, you have to do two years for every for over a year, you have left in the Air National Guard. Oh, okay. Well, that's cool. That's fine. That's what I did. And then so that was just that was, you know, so I did five years plus six years. And then But before that, you know, at 11th, I think, back I stick around eight and a half years in.

Amber Tresca 16:27

What did you do after that?

Jordan McConnell 16:29

I didn't really have much time to, you know, process the nor the enormity of it all. So, you know, but I, I got a different job. You know, probably one of the biggest things that changed pretty shortly after that is that I didn't have it in me to listen to people complain about their cable anymore.

[LAUGHTER]

Jordan McConnell 16:47

So I had a good time, I learned a whole lot, you know, fixing you know, cable, internet, phone, all that stuff. But I just, that was I was ready for something else. And so the probably the biggest change was that I tried to just move on with my career.

Jordan McConnell 17:04

And so, so I, I got a job at, um, I think I'd like an outsourcing company doing IT for them. And then, and then I actually got probably the biggest thing and just really just trying to move, move on my career, you know, so probably after the Air Force, one of my goals in life was to match the kind of level of what I'd done in the Air Force in the, in the civilian world.

Jordan McConnell 17:29

I was stationed at Langley Air Force Base, in Virginia. And, and I worked at the, like a network operations center. And I was an administrator for like, 100,000 people at 15 Air Force bases, and other things all the way all over the world. And I like yeah, to have like a top secret clearance in the room to where I worked in. And, like, when my dad came in, they couldn't cover the screens, and all that kind of stuff was like, really, like, "secret squirrel" type thing.

Jordan McConnell 17:52

And so like, so I wanted, and not only that, but as a staff sergeant at the time I was paid, okay, right. And so now I was like, man, you know, if I could create this type of vibe, you know, this

type of, you know, a cool job with cool money. And, you know, in the civilian world, you know, that's what I'm trying to aim at. And so that took a really long time, but I can, I can say that I've done it.

Jordan McConnell 18:13

But I started you know, with working at that outsourcing company, and then I got my bachelor's degree. And then in the bachelor's degree, like really kind of really catapulted me up, because in Omaha, that's kind of a, at least, at least in my experience, that that was a...Omaha has a really, really low unemployment rate, you know, everybody, you can really, really get to get a job there if you want one. But as far as the quality of that job with a job pays is heavily determined on your education. So with me, you know, IT guy and stuff, I actually got a degree in human resources and personnel and like administration and stuff.

Jordan McConnell 18:48

And without that said, like, no tech degree and no, at the time tech certifications, and, and I got hired as the network administrator and client support for a capital firm down in downtown Omaha. Getting a bachelor's degree matters. And so, because it definitely helped me, you know.

Jordan McConnell 19:10

For Crohn's though, something that's definitely changed in the last few years is kind of this stuff like this, you know, sharing my story. And so and so and so that's why I, you know, I spent probably a year just getting on Instagram, and it's kind of deciding to be the change I want to see to see in the world. You know, there wasn't, it wasn't easy to find African American guys or girls or people, that were talking about IBD. You know, like, maybe not just at all, like, that was a very, very small audience of people.

Jordan McConnell 19:11

So like, and so I was like, Okay, well, that's, you know, if that's the case, you know, there might be another, you know, somebody like me out there that's looking for that, and so and so I want to be the change I want to see in the world, and so that's what I did, and so for the first year or so I just kind of just share just kind of my life, you know, a little bit. And then and then about a year later I started, I started my own podcast Crohn's Veteran, a lifestyle brand and everything. And so we're, I think about 44 episodes in And, we've probably done about three dozen interviews. Really, really, really proud of the show.

Jordan McConnell 20:04

And I'm really happy with my co-hosts, CJ Cabrera and Renika Wood, they're amazing. They're amazing people. CJ has ulcerative colitis and Renika has Crohn's disease. And so they so the three of us just, you know, talk about, you know, you know, how to kind of live your best life, you know, with these, you know, conditions and also, you know, allowing people to have a platform to share their own experiences that, which is not always, you know, so easy to find.

[MUSIC: About IBD Transition]

Amber Tresca 20:53

There's a lot of different ways to get into the patient advocacy world in the IBD space. What made you decide on podcasting?

Jordan McConnell 21:03

Pretty much for the same reason that there's, you know, I was looking at for, you know, for Crohn's podcasts. Of the ones that, you know, they're still making episodes, which is only which is very, very few. Again, there was, there was, there was like, no diversity in that there was no diversity of voices really. And so it might get on, you know, and so I think it was just, you know, like a few, maybe a few women, you know, it wasn't even like, you know, maybe even guys, or maybe like, one guy, a couple, a couple, like a few women. I was like, man, like, "Where's everybody at," kind of thing?

[LAUGHTER]

Jordan McConnell 21:33

And so, because I know, there's hundreds of 1000s or millions of people all over the world, you know, and that have this condition, you know, and so like, so that's the case, you know, it's kind of like, well, I want to be that, again, like I want to be that change.

Jordan McConnell 21:48

And not only that is...the reason I chose a podcast is kind of embracing the uncomfortable, you know, I have a speech impediment a little bit, I stutter sometimes. And so like, so just the idea of like, getting on camera, talking on camera, I'm really comfortable talking in person in front of people, but, but getting on camera talking and you know, just doing stuff like this is kind of outside my comfort zone. So I chose podcasting to kind of intentionally grow. I guess.

Amber Tresca 22:18

That's amazing. I love that answer so much. And I enjoy your show very much. Your voices are so impactful. And I love the guests that you find and the questions that you ask because they're things that I wouldn't ask guests. So I just, I just love listening, and it has expanded my knowledge of the community so much.

Amber Tresca 22:44

So let's talk for a minute though. We're doing a father's day episode. And because I follow you on the Instagram, and I love seeing when you post photos of your son.

Jordan McConnell 22:59

Thank you.

Amber Tresca 22:59

So he's so cute. Oh my gosh, I mean...

Jordan McConnell 23:04

I think so too, but I'm a little biased.

Amber Tresca 23:07

Well, okay, I don't know if I'm objective, but he is very, he's very cute. Tell me a little bit about him. What's it, what's it like to be a father?

Jordan McConnell 23:15

Yeah. And so I mean, life is interesting. And so, you know, I, you know, since I have, you know, active Crohn's disease and everything that has, you know, all these, you know, active symptoms and everything like that, I say to myself, well, wow, you know, you know, having kids...whooh...I'm tired and sick now, like, you know, I don't want to know about all that.

Jordan McConnell 23:35

And so, but they know, I guess, you know, life happens when you make plans, Amber, as they say. And so, it just so happened that, you know, we woke up one day in October in 2014. And my wife came home, I think, from working my wife was like, you know, I think I'm pregnant. I remember like, I remember like, laughing at like, wow, that's like, life happens and stuff. But she's like, Okay, well I'm gonna get a pregnancy test, and then so it was positive so I'm gonna go to the doctor on Monday. I'm like, okay, cool and so and so then like I said she was at the doctor on Monday.

Jordan McConnell 24:12

And then she comes home she's like yeah, actually we're having a kid in six weeks.

Amber Tresca 24:16

Wait what? So oh my gosh, what did you do, how did you plan?

Jordan McConnell 24:22

Yeah, we did you know we went from you know like, life comes at you fast type thing and so yes, yes. We had no time to you know, panic fret worry, like any of that kind of stuff because, you know, we had you know, six weeks before this little dude popped into the world.

Jordan McConnell 24:40

And so, yeah, so we were in a one bedroom apartment, you know, just like hanging out like going on dates and stuff. And you know, by the way, we have been together for like already three years and you know, when we were like engaged or you know, doing we're doing all these normal all these normal thing. And now and he you know, popped up.

Jordan McConnell 24:58

Yeah, but so but fortunately, you know, you're given that we had no notice on the pretty much the entire pregnancy, you know, he, you know, fine. He has no allergies, you know, he has, he has all of his teeth that they you know, he's, he's normal, you know, he's you know, he's fine, he's fine, healthy, fine, happy little guy.

Jordan McConnell 25:22

And so I'm you know, very happy you know, and he's a joy to be around and all that stuff and so, you know, he's about to graduate kindergarten here this week, that was unique. And so, you know, COVID and everything, you know, he did, like remote learning and stuff. And so that was. Well, yeah, but that's it. And so I mean, but yeah, but he's amazing. He's fun. Like, you know, we, you know, we hang out together, like, and, you know, he makes you know, having, Crohn's disease, you know, suck, a lot less.

Amber Tresca 25:54

I love that. Suck a lot less! So, before you had your son, you thought maybe it would be really difficult to live with a chronic illness, and then also be a parent.

Jordan McConnell 26:07

Correct.

Amber Tresca 26:07

Has your mind changed about that? Or what are some of the challenges that you have?

Jordan McConnell 26:12

Yeah, I mean, that the challenge is, is that because, you know, the symptoms with Crohn's disease, you know, it's fatigue, it's, you know, it's diarrhea, it's, you know, all these, you know, it's all these, you know, draining kind of symptoms and stuff. And so I was like, I remember being worried, you know, like, can I go outside and play ball, all these things, but the reality is, is that, you know, we've had a pretty good time.

Jordan McConnell 26:37

And, you know, and he...probably one of the coolest things, Amber, is that you know he will, he's told us, like, his teachers and stuff like that, like, "my dad's the owner of Crohn's Veteran," and stuff like that. So that's pretty rad, because it's just like a passion project of mine and stuff. So him, being that proud of it, you know, that he's telling other people about it is really, really cool.

Amber Tresca 26:59

That's so sweet. So you already talked about how you went, looking for people like you in the IBD space, and you couldn't find them. Because it's not a surprise or mystery that the advocacy community is pretty much dominated by women. So what, what are we missing? What are we missing about men's health that you think needs to be brought into the forefront more when we're talking about IBD?

Jordan McConnell 27:26

Well, I, I...voices, you know, just men's voices. You know, just, there's a, there's several people that you know, that I you know, follow on Instagram, and then on other places, and I think just, you know, engaging with those people, finding those people, like, I think that some of the

bigger foundations and bigger organizations, I think it'd be beneficial to find and engage with, you know, people men from, you know, just different parts of the world and stuff.

Jordan McConnell 27:54

You know, especially the African American community, you know, the Hispanic community, you know, other, communities, the trans community, stuff like that. But other folks with Crohn's and everything, those, those type of men, I think, getting their voices would be very valuable, because I think one of the biggest problems of Crohn's disease is that it's so isolating. And, and even though that, you know, you know, about 3 million people or so might have it in the United States, you know, that's still, you know, there's 310 million people in our country, or 370 million people or whatever. So, that's still, you know, it may seem like a lot, but not really.

Jordan McConnell 28:32

So, so being able to go online, or go on a resource or, and actually see somebody like, oh, man, this person, you know, has a similar story to mind, you know, what did, what did they do to cope? And, you know, what did they do to get through, you know, maybe I can learn from them or engage them, you know, and maybe even, you know, make, you know, make a new connection with somebody.

Amber Tresca 28:51

I wonder if you have any ideas about how we can engage more men, because I'll tell you something that I see a lot is that I see women coming into different spaces, you know, Facebook groups, or what have you. And they'll say, I have this question. It is my husband, my father, my son, so the women are coming in and asking these questions on behalf of, you know, their partner or their son or their father. How can we get the men to come into the spaces and, and ask their own questions? How can we make men more comfortable?

Jordan McConnell 29:26

Right, I mean, I think that, uh, you know, hopefully, you know, interviews like, like this one, you know, like, you know, people like myself, and you know, and other people like us and my co-hosts and the people on Instagram and the IBD community, just being out there and getting on camera and talking about it.

Jordan McConnell 29:43

Like, I think that, you know, I think it's easy just to post a picture and you know, and do a caption and everything, but, you know, but actually, you know, getting up and kind of, you know, giving your testimony. I think you know, what I think will help people, you know, get more comfortable, you know, and get engaging with others know because they know, this guy is OK talking about it, maybe, you know, I'm OK to talk, talking about it too. And, you know, just, again. And of course, you know, anybody can reach out to me, you know, anybody can reach out to my co-hosts or anything like that, if they want to talk or, you know, and I'll be more than happy to, you know, help them myself or point you in right direction.

Amber Tresca 30:19

I see a lot of tips all the time for moms with IBD. Of course, I'm one of the co-founders of IBD moms. So I write those tips a lot. I don't see a lot about tips for IBD dads. Like what do you think? What are some tips that you would have now that you're, you were kind of thrown into parenting? So you're probably actually a really good person to give tips on being a father and living with Crohn's disease.

Jordan McConnell 30:47

Yeah, well, thank you. Um, that's, that's a good, that's a good question, I would say, you know, what, what I've learned is that, um, as early as possible, you know, educating, you know, educating your son or your daughter, about, you know, kind of what you go through and stuff. And so, they can kind of get used to it, if they, you know, if you have to lay down, if you have to, you know, take it easy, or you maybe you're planning on doing something, you were able to deal with this, you know, kind of, you know, teaching your kid...teaching your child empathy and compassion, you know, for, you know, for your condition. And, and also, you know, showing them that, you know, also the strength of that, you know, powering through and overcoming that condition, too.

Amber Tresca 31:26

I think that's right. I think that kids of parents who live with a chronic illness, are sometimes more empathic. What do you think about that? Do you think that's true?

Jordan McConnell 31:36

I think that's true. I think that's true. Because, um, you know, I would say that me and my, my wife are pretty empathetic people too. And so I think we've, so yes, our son is really very, very in tune with, you know, people's emotions and people's vibes, stuff like that. So I would, Yeah, I would agree with that.

Amber Tresca 31:51

Yeah, it sounds like he's already very proud of you, and the work that you do, which is amazing. That's really fantastic.

Jordan McConnell 31:59

It kind of gives you a warm, fuzzy, you know, when you know, you know, when you, you know, things that you know, t's just a little something that you're working on, in some ways, like, yeah, [like a child] "my dad is like..." it's like a whole deal. So it's pretty, it's pretty cool. Pretty cool.

Amber Tresca 32:11

It's like your brand ambassador already.

Jordan McConnell 32:16

I should have a little Crohn's Veteran shirt for kindergarten.

Amber Tresca 32:19

That would be fantastic. Ask me about my dad's Crohn's.

[LAUGHTER]

Amber Tresca 32:28

Jordan, you have had so many careers, you've learned how to do so many things through your military career, and then afterward, setting aside being yelled at by the cable people. What would you say to people who are living with a chronic illness who are looking to pursue their dreams and to forge their own path? Do you have any advice or words of wisdom for them?

Jordan McConnell 32:52

Yes, yes, I would say that, you know, with, you know, that don't compare yourself to others, as a general rule, and especially with IBD. And, because it's an invisible illness. And so, you know, so you say, and so you may see somebody that, you know, is younger than you or older than you or, you know, or has, you know, more material items, or whatever it is, you know, just you know, do not compare yourself to other people.

Jordan McConnell 33:17

And, and also, you know, don't give up, you know, just, you know, practice to me it's calm, like that movie, True Grit, you know. I think with IBD, it kind of depends a little bit of, you know, gritty determination, you know, of never giving up on your dreams. And so, you know, but I'm also an entrepreneur with a couple of startups. And so, those required, even when I was sick, even when I was not feeling well, to, you know, to just water that tree a little bit every single day. And so and so I would encourage everybody out there, no matter how bad it gets, you know, never let your dreams die.

[MUSIC: About IBD Piano]

Amber Tresca 34:03

So what's next for Crohn's Veteran.

Jordan McConnell 34:07

Growing the show. We have a few different things that we're working on. And so, um, you know, you know, one of them is the, the dream, or the goal of creating an IBD retreat. And so like those, I think that'd be really fun. You know, we can, I know if you're interested in talking about that, you know, I'll be more than happy to do so. But just the idea of having maybe vendors or, you know, mental health people or, you know, medical liaisons or, you know, IBD friendly food and stuff, but I think this be kind of a creating a place for people that can come together and connect and you know, connect and meet and meet each other.

Jordan McConnell 34:45

But as far as the show, goes and the brand goes, I'm adding, I'm adding new stuff to the, to our stores. So I encourage everybody to check out the Crohn's Veteran Teespring store, we have

great stuff for Crohn's and colitis. And so, so you can Your toes gear on there, I'm going to be adding hats and some other some other cool things on there too. And so check that out.

Jordan McConnell 35:07

We're gonna be expanding the website, making just making that better. And because it's kind of like a placeholder type things for people can be looking to hang out and see what we're doing. I want to interview people and be interviewed by non IBD...kind of do both, you know, like, I want to, I want to interview Of course, I love interviewing people with IBD and hearing their stories is why it's why it's why I do what I do. But also just in the interest of awareness, you know, if we're talking to just avoid talking to people with IBD it can be a little bit of an echo chamber. And so like, and so, so the idea is to reach out and find and find people.

Jordan McConnell 35:45

And we're looking for sponsorships. So if anybody's listening to this, you know, Crohn's Veteran, Jordan McConnell, interested in a sponsor, and we're out here, just just trying to try to grow, create revenue streams.

Jordan McConnell 35:56

The idea is to...actually I heard some good marketing advice. There's this guy named David Meltzer, and that I listen to and on Instagram, and he was saying, "make a lot of money, help a lot of people, and have a lot of fun." And so that's what I want to do with Crohn's Veteran, and I want to create a lot of money for it. Like, you know, to help to impact a lot of people. So creating revenue streams in order to do so.

Amber Tresca 35:56

I love these ideas. So I'm so glad you're in this space. Take me through your social media, though and your website so that everyone can find you especially if they have sponsorship opportunities for you.

Jordan McConnell 36:30

Yeah, definitely for it for for sponsorship opportunities, you can reach out to me at Jordan at Crohn's Veteran C-R-O-H-N-S-V-E-T-E-R-A-N.com. Our website is www.crohnsveteran.com. My Instagram is pretty creative as @CrohnsVeterans, and then and then the and then our actual podcast page is @official.crohnsveteran.

Jordan McConnell 36:59

We also have a YouTube channel. So we're well on all the podcast platforms Apple, Google, Spotify, Anchor and all that kind of good stuff. And so we're also on Twitch we do twitch live streams, gaming, you know, if anybody wants to get a game with me, you know, my PlayStation handles is Crohn's Veteran also. So you can reach out to me on that, we can game. So, yeah, you know, I'm out here just trying to kind of grow the brand. And I said, I'm a business person, entrepreneur. I'm also a Chief Product Officer for two tech startups. And so in addition to being an IT guy, and also Crohn's Veteran podcast person, so please reach out to me, I'm doing a few

things and I would love to you know, meet people and to make them see we can do and be of service to each other.

Amber Tresca 37:45

Jordan, you are a very busy man, thank you so much for talking with me about all of these issues. And for telling me more about Crohn's Veteran, it has been amazing to watch you grow your brand. And of course I do listen to your show. I don't usually watch because I'm not really like a video person. I am over 40 but I definitely listen, and I've enjoyed it very much. So thank you so much for your voice. And thank you so much for talking with me.

Jordan McConnell 38:12

Well, thank you for having me. It's been a it's been a pleasure.

Amber Tresca 38:18

Hey super listener! Thanks to Jordan McConnell for sharing his story and for his work in developing Crohn's Veteran and creating a community that is expanding our understanding of how people are affected by IBD and also helping more patients to feel less alone. You can subscribe to the Crohn's Veteran podcast wherever you like to listen, or connect on Instagram, Twitch, or YouTube. Their web site is CrohnsVeteran.com, where you can find all their social media information and their store. And I'll let you know that you can find Colitis Veteran merch in the store as well.

My goal with About IBD is to educate people living with IBD and to help foster community. The voices of men, and especially men of color, are not often heard in the IBD community. If you're interested in sharing your journey, you can get in touch with me at AboutIBD.com. And you can find me on all social media as About IBD.

As always, I will put these links in the show notes and on my Episode 96 page on AboutIBD.com.

Thanks for listening, and remember, until next time, I want you to know more About IBD.

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