

Everyone has a story: talking about mental health

Introducing Kabir Nath, COMPASS Pathways' new CEO

COMPASS's co-founders, Ekaterina Malievskaia and George Goldsmith, chat with Kabir Nath, newly appointed Chief Executive Officer of COMPASS, about his story, his new role, and making the COMPASS mission a reality.

This special edition of the podcast is occurring because Kabir Nath, former Senior Managing Director of Global Pharmaceutical Business, at Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., and CEO of Otsuka North America, has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of COMPASS Pathways, effective 1 August 2022. Co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer of COMPASS, Ekaterina Malievskaia, and Co-founder and Chairman George Goldsmith, speak with Kabir.

[0:00] Ekaterina introduces herself (Katya), Kabir, and George and explains the transition.

[1:00] Kabir and George are welcomed to the conversation. Ekaterina provides the history that, about six years ago, she and George founded COMPASS Pathways, a mental healthcare company dedicated to accelerating patients' access to evidence-based innovation in mental health. Shortly after that, they met their third co-founder, Lars Wilde, who has since founded another biotech platform. The three co-founders take their role seriously: setting the vision and mission for the company; setting a high bar for ethics, culture, and performance; and forming the best possible team to bring the mission to life.

[2:20] Katya shares the progress the founding team has made in six years. Their achievements include the design and completion of a successful phase II study of COMP360 psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression. With more than 20 sites, in 10 countries, in seven languages, this is the largest randomised controlled study of psilocybin in depression. They've designed a training program and trained more than 60 therapists for psychedelic research sessions. They've had in-depth conversations with regulators and payors in the US and Europe to determine the evidence that will be necessary to get psilocybin approved, reimbursed, and incorporated into care guidelines. They have partnered with top institutions and the UK National Health Service (NHS), and have established Centers of Excellence at two institutions: Sheppard Pratt Hospital in Maryland, and King's College Maudsley in London - the first time that the NHS has partnered with a company developing a psychedelic. They've developed drug-discovery capabilities in two labs and have built functions in the company, growing from 12 people in 2018 to more than 160 today, with offices in London, New York, and San Francisco.

[4:07] Katya discusses the importance of building a strong culture and the thought that went into - with the board - developing a succession plan and searching for a new CEO, which is particularly important as the company begins to look toward phase III and commercial launch. She shared the way that personal connections to mental health challenges have always been important to all discussions about COMPASS.

[6:30] George shares the personal story that he and Katya had with their son's mental-health struggles, which motivated them to investigate options and find the need for new options, particularly psilocybin. Katya agrees and explains that they spoke with hundreds of

people who shared their own personal struggles.

[9:52] Kabir explains his deep personal connection with mental illness: one of his closest school friends, an immediate family member, and a dear university friend, all died by suicide. He has experienced and seen the impact of mental health challenges on people and their families – and, he notes, on colleagues, though the workplace stigma of disclosing such issues remains.

[11:30] Katya encourages Kabir to share a little more about himself. He explains that, while currently located near Princeton, New Jersey, he grew up in England, and has lived in Asia and now the United States; his wife is South African. He defines himself as being driven by purpose. George points out the alignment between Kabir’s outlook and his and Katya’s.

[13:28] Answering Katya’s question, “How did this happen?” Kabir explains his history at Otsuka and their similar dedication to innovation in mental health. After going to Davos and hearing discussion of psychedelics, he encouraged the creation of a team to research the field, whose conclusion was that he should speak with COMPASS – after which Otsuka invested in COMPASS.

[16:12] Katya agrees that she was reassured by how comprehensive and holistic Otsuka’s approach was, and how she was struck by their involvement of patients in their approach, and by Otsuka’s generosity with advice.

[17:15] George discusses the need for new models of care in 21st century healthcare.

[18:20] Kabir notes the complexity of the journey to mental wellness, and the need to acknowledge that a drug is, at best, only a part of that. At the population level, outcomes for people with chronic serious mental illness are not good, and that requires change. George agrees.

[19:50] Kabir notes that any real progress of the field into what could be called precision psychology will be difficult and take some time, and innovation and technology and digital tools will be required.

[20:12] Katya explains that a new ecosystem is required for novel interventions to be created and accessible, which includes attention to community support, diversity and inclusion, economic and social determinants of health, all of which have to be taken seriously to make a dent in the mental health crisis. George agrees and notes that that focus, and the collaboration required to make a difference – not just selling – are necessary.

[21:40] Kabir explains the ways in which a new model – including co-creation with patients – is necessary to work in the face of the unsustainable US healthcare system. George and Katya agree, pointing out that the existing infrastructure has been optimised for decades around the prior model, and that disturbing it and its interdependencies is challenging, as one person’s inefficiency is another person’s revenue stream.

[23:10] Katya, George, and Kabir discuss corporate culture and values. George notes the lack of hierarchy at COMPASS. He also notes the way that the best corporate values create tension, in relation to COMPASS's values of compassion, boldness, rigor, inclusiveness, and how that power is critical, since every 40 seconds, someone dies of suicide and 20 people attempt it.

[26:25] Katya, Kabir, and George talk more about culture, values, and purpose, and their importance to finding, and keeping, the right employees. Kabir notes that at Otsuka, he introduced a new value, that of humility.

[29:20] The team discusses the diversity of the talent of COMPASS Pathways employees, and its importance as the company works to try to do something unprecedented. Katya points out that part of the value proposition COMPASS has always offered employees is the exposure to different types of work, and the cross-pollination of ideas. George shares that he hosts - and, soon, Kabir will host - a regular call with the newest employees to share what brought them to the company.

[32:20] Katya encourages Kabir to share the learnings that he hopes to bring to his new role. He relates his understanding of the environment and its complexity, as well as his experience running a successful commercial business, which is particularly relevant as COMP360 proceeds through development. He also outlines his experience with payors, and with digital health innovation, which will relate to his role as CEO. He and Katya discuss patient-centricity, and he notes that his background in HIV research, as well as his time with Otsuka, helped him gain experience in areas where patients were exceptionally involved in research and discussion.

[38:40] What's next, asks Katya? George explains his excitement that his new role as chair will include building public-private partnerships with health systems and policy shaping. He refers to the term "escape velocity" and compares it to achieving the power to escape the status quo. Kabir agrees, noting that as the company becomes operationally more complex, he looks forward to building the vision with the founders.

[42:15] George, Kabir, and Katya share their excitement to be at this new stage for the company.