

# Inspiring Women

## Episode 46: Dr. Monica Bolbjerg

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership, and over the years I've come to learn one thing. Women need women, and not just any women but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at [inspiringwomen.show](http://inspiringwomen.show), or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening, and I hope you will be inspired.

Laurie McGraw:

On today's episode of Inspiring Women, we are speaking with Dr. Monica Bolbjerg and she is an urgent care physician. She is a doctor, an entrepreneur and a digital health pioneer. She is also currently the Chairman, CEO and Founder of Qure4u. Now, Qure4u is a telehealth and remote patient monitoring company in Central Florida. She is building a community there. Dr. Bolbjerg is someone who is as an innovator when she founded Qure4u in 2013. She did that having already won multiple innovation awards and is recognized as... and a featured speaker at many health innovation think tanks and conferences. I'm really looking forward to this Inspiring Women conversation. And Dr. Bolbjerg, very good to be speaking to you today.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Very nice to just be speaking. Yes, well, and then thanks for inviting me.

Laurie McGraw:

All right. Well, let's get started. As I always get started, Monica, on these conversations, I'd like to talk about, what are you doing right now in your professional career? What is your day-to-day look like?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. Well, right now in these days, I'm preparing a board meeting for next week. So, but it's actually very exciting. I mean, we have a lot of opportunities in our company right now. There's so many exciting things happening in this industry with virtual care and so on, so it's going to be more like a strategy session next week. So, I'm really looking forward to that, kind of kicking it off in the second half of the year.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, I want to talk about your company, Qure4u, but before we even get into that, I want to start with sort of the personal story of how you got here. You did your undergraduate and medical work in Denmark. You were a practicing physician there. You moved your company and your

business over to the United States. You also were early in the work of digital health, starting the first patient portal in Denmark many years ago. And so, just how did that journey happen, from practicing physician to innovator, to entrepreneur, to now leading a growing company?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. No, I mean, there was a lot of factors, of course. Most importantly I think was two things. When I came out as a young physician, I got really frustrated about the lack of tools for me to interact with my patients when we're not together. So I met a lot of patients that had not been treated well because they just couldn't get back in touch with their doctor or they misunderstood what was going on. And at the same time, I felt like I needed to stay connected with my patients but I didn't really know how. Also, I got really frustrated with the workflows in a hospital and in healthcare. I mean, it was just not efficient. So I was doing my PhD and they put me in the basement in the Copenhagen University Hospital, and I got a little bored about this lab work and then I came up with this idea. And so, that's kind of how it all started.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

I'd said like, "Hey." Called my husband and said like, "I think I'm quitting my job, and I'm thinking I'm going to create this thing where patients and doctors can interact," and there was no word for it, but a patient portal that we created back in 2001.

Laurie McGraw:

And when you did that, did you do that on your own? You found your Qure4u company with your husband. Did you do that early thing with your husband as well?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yes. I somehow crazily got him to quit his job as well.

Laurie McGraw:

Oh, my gosh.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

We had just bought a house and had two little kids, but I was like, "Ah, we can do this. It's much more fun." So, and he was like, "Yeah, let's do it." So, that's how it all started. So I was working still, I guess, an urgent care physician. A lot in Norway, because you could make more money in Norway and that was more flexible for me. And that's how we founded our first company in Denmark, and it really took off quickly. We had 30% of the population using our tools within two or three years. So, it was a lot of fun.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, it also, I mean, in the rearview mirror it sounds sort of romantic and perfect, but I imagine it was... I mean, quitting your job with two small kids at home, my goodness. You had to have a lot of confidence in what you were doing, particularly when patient portals weren't something that was well established at that point. That's just incredible. So, did you convince your husband? I'm just baffled here.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah, I know. I mean, he's always been great in kind of supporting me with my ideas and so on. So I mean, looking back, it was crazy, right? There was no internet. We had modem. The doctors didn't have an internet, so we first need to convince them to get a modem, to get some kind of internet, and then they could use our tools. But I think we were also very lucky. It was a really good timing at that point. The government also came out with some payment models that kind of supported secure messaging with patients, so the timing was right as well for us.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, for physicians being frustrated with particular workflows, I mean, this is not a new story, but the angle on this that is new is actually doing something as perhaps adventurous, maybe crazy, but in hindsight, obviously exceptional. So, what do you think is different about you in terms of why you have that drive to take the next step, from taking a frustrating workflow and then creating something from a technology perspective? And I mean, your background as I understand it is in medicine, not necessarily technology. So, how did that connection and leap happen?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

I mean, I think two things. A lot from my parents. Both my parents are surgeons. My dad has always supported me, even though I'm a woman, to be like, "You can do whatever you want to do." So, I have a lot of confidence from early on in my life. And my mom the same, but my mom inspired me in another way. She's very innovative, entrepreneurial. She never started anything herself, but she was always seeing things coming. And she actually inspired me that when she was... she built her own website with online scheduling in 1999 and, for her practice. So, I think I was just raised in a way that you can kind of do it if you want to do it. And I was like, "Yeah, let's do it." I wasn't afraid.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

I would also say, I mean, think in Denmark you have a lot of support around you. I mean, if you fail you can always go out and find a job. Somebody will help you. I mean, that piece helped a little bit as well, of course, that I wasn't afraid; if it failed, I could always go back to be a doctor and get my job back.

Laurie McGraw:

Go back to be a doctor. Oh, gee. Well, so you're starting with family support and you have people that you look up to in terms of parents, who sort of inspired you. And then you also have the safety net, which is also I think very interesting, right? In terms of being able to have the courage to do something but knowing that you also, if it doesn't work out there's something else to go to. But then you picked up and you moved to the United States. So after that success in Denmark with the patient portal, you moved to the US to then begin further innovative companies with Qure4u. So, how did that evolve and what was the impetus for that?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Well, we got to a point where we could not grow anymore in Denmark. I mean, the population is small. We had 30% of the population using our idea, and I wanted to do more. And the same

time, even though Denmark was far ahead of everywhere else early on, the payment model never changed and they never moved on from the patient portal, really. So I was looking for somewhere else where you could be innovative, where there was a lot of potential, a lot of high growth, a big population. So we actually, we moved to France, tried there, and that didn't work. Then we moved to London, tried the UK. That was not good timing with the payment models over there. And then we're like, "Okay, let's go to the US," so that's how it kind of like, how we ended up over here.

Laurie McGraw:

Okay. And so you're in Florida. Have you always been in Florida?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. And that was also a little bit by accident we landed here. Our two kids played a lot of tennis, so as a... wanted share academies in our area, so that's why we started. And when we were here, I was like, "Oh, there's a lot of doctors around here. So, let's start here." And we really liked this area, so we kind of stayed here.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, great. So, let's talk about the current company, Qure4u. So, how did that begin? And I also wanted to get a sense for your building what I understand is kind of a tech center community in Central Florida. And so I'm interested in the community that you have around you as well in that geography.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. So we moved to the US and then we were kind of looking... Since we had tried in two other countries, we knew it was a big investments to start up in another country. So we spend a couple of years building the network, finding out how to do it over here. And then we... I was traveling with McKinsey & Company, I was speaking in Dubai, and met another US company at that point that introduced me to athenahealth. So, that's how it kind of like, we were like, "Okay, partnership with a female... that's a world we know. We always integrate with [inaudible 00:10:29] and build upon those relationships." So that's kind of what kicked us off here in the US, and we raised our first round in '17. And since we really liked this area here, I'm really working to kind of find local talent, attract people to this area, because there's so much potential here, and especially after last year where people kind of realized that they didn't have to stay in the big cities.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

A lot of people are kind of like willing to move to this area. So I'm thinking we can build something around, especially around women in tech, I'm hoping to build; something here in this area and kind of get that kicked off.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, I hope you're wildly successful with that. There need to be more women in tech. But as you started your company, as you started to get settled in Florida and you're building Qure4u, did you find as a female, founder, leader... And I don't need to tell you, but there aren't enough of

you. But when I talk to other female founders and CEOs, they either sort of fall into a category of, "Well, I didn't really know that I was the only one. I just sort of had a vision," or, "I was very purposefully aware that I was one of you, and it was important for me to build a community." Do either one of those sort of areas represent you, or how do you think about being that female leader around what you need to build a successful company?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

So I have actually never really thought about the difference between men and women, like kind of in my career, and thought about me as a woman. I've more focused on being good at what I am doing. I look at it as... But there's more difference between men and women here in the US than there is in Denmark; we are more equal. So, but I actually think that you can turn it around to be an advantage because people listen more to you, and they see you more than all these men. So for me, it has never been a disadvantage. I think you, as a woman, need to have confidence. And if you have confidence, you can do whatever you want to do. And that's the thing I think a lot of women lack, is the confidence and standing strong on your beliefs. And not being afraid of taking some of those discussions with the men, because sometimes men can be really loud in their approach if they want to get their opinion through, whereas women tend to then stand back. And I think if you just stand up and talk about your belief and feel good about that, you can do whatever you want to do as a woman.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, you also come with a level of confidence. You come with an unbelievable degree as a physician, so you're walking in with those things. But you also recognize that... So I agree with you, and it's very encouraging to hear your comment, that you don't necessarily see it as different or a struggle, but just as something that you can own and control; that's encouraging. But you, with your confidence, and having grown up with that with a family that was very supportive and had expectations, you see women who perhaps don't have that. So in building out your community, you have women in tech, how do you help women? Or what do you think women can do to have more confidence? Is it just "get over it" kind of thing, or what do you see and what do you suggest?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Well, I do a lot of mentorship and kind of telling women to find that confidence, but also build their career. Make sure you... I mean, men do this, right? They take the right degrees, they take the right courses, they've built their career; it doesn't come by itself. But I think there's also some support that needs to happen around women, especially around moms. And so that's something that is really important for me to do in our company, and I actually look at it as something that we use to attract talent. I always tell every woman that I'm interviewing that it will never be a disadvantage to have children in my company. On the contrary, I love hiring moms. I feel like we are much more efficient. You learn to multitask, et cetera. And if you just give those women the safety net and the knowledge that if they have something to do with their kids, they can do that and just catch up later, you can really get them going. And so, that's some of those things I'm doing.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, I think that's fantastic. And actually, that's very accessible advice. I think safety net is very important; having a supportive environment in the workplace. And in particular women, as mothers, often young mothers, this pandemic has taken a toll. And this is studied. This has been difficult on so many, but for women who are trying to advance their professional careers, younger mothers have taken more of a hit. So, how does that work at Qure4u in terms of just creating that safety net? Is it by example? During the pandemic, you with your children, how did you sort of lead through that show and what happened within your company?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. I mean, we have... so my husband and I have four kids together. And we-

Laurie McGraw:

Four? Oh, my goodness.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. So two older ones and two young ones, so we kind of made it in two sets. But we've always shared everything, and I think that's a good example as well. So during the pandemic, it was actually my husband that stayed home and worked from home and me who went to the office, and not vice versa. So, that's one example I think is important here. Other things we do is to let people know, well, if you have a child that is coughing, maybe not very sick but it's coughing, whatever it is, take care of that child, work from home. We also now, we're moving into new offices. We're putting in a room where like, kind of a playroom, so if you need to pick up your kid early and there's something you need to do, bring in the kid and put it in the playroom and let them have fun. And I think just looking at that as a family, we all take care of each other and we help each other, it drives everything forward.

Laurie McGraw:

And it also creates a culture, right? I mean, the workplace environments are changing. That is absolutely... As we all re-enter into the workforce or return to office and whatever that might mean for your companies, people are looking and expecting different environments. So, that just sounds fantastic. And boy, that just also sounds like a lot to juggle. Now, your company is focused on telemedicine and remote patient monitoring, and during the course of the pandemic, that has nothing but exploded in terms of utilization. What's happening with Qure4u? What are you seeing out there in the healthcare ecosystem?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. So, and we had to do even more than that. We kind of like... The entire patient journey, from intake to telehealth to secure messaging to online schedule, whatever it is that you need to interact with patient and physicians, are not together. That's our technology. And so what is happening now in this industry is that before people were looking at point solutions; "I need telehealth, I need online scheduling, I need secure messaging." Now, everybody realize they need a platform. So, we are actually doing a lot of strategy with our customers about, how do you implement a platform? So the way that you have all the tools you need, and you can now build on top of that, because there's a lot of innovation happening now every day. And everybody's building on that patient engagement, virtual care, how do we interact with our

patients? How do we get more data to flow between patients and doctors so that we can improve the care of our patients?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

So, next phase now is very clinical. It's the remote patient monitoring. It's getting the data when the patient is at home. And how do we then optimize the treatment plans we set for our patients? How do we optimize communication with our patients so that they don't have to come back and forth to the office all the time?

Laurie McGraw:

And how do you integrate it into the workflows of the physician, which are also changing all the time? There is so much innovation that is happening out there right now. So that just says to me that the pace of work and the pace of innovation within the company has to be at a... I'll just call it an accelerated or high rate. Something for growing companies is the raising of capital and how to continue the growth, and you talked about founding the company and raising seed capital. What are your experiences there? Again, the amount of dollars that are going to female founders and female CEOs is significantly less, and that's in part due to, there's just not enough people like you perhaps to close that gender equality gap there. But how did you approach raising capital? Do you see it as anything different or is it just, you have a process that you work through? I'm curious as to your advice there.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Well, first of all, I have a really good CFO, which is my husband, which is helpful. And so for me, I've been lucky working with him always because we are a team. But again, I think coming as a woman actually can open up the doors and because it's kind of different, and maybe they listen a little more just to see, who's this? And so, it can kind of get you in the door. There's a lot of, they're all coming up angel funds, or funds just for women, et cetera. And we had a board member that sent us a lot of those over. I mean, we looked at that. I didn't feel it was very interesting because a lot of those funds out there that are focusing on women are not handing out a lot of money and are looking at industries and things that are... for me, it was actually a little discriminating. It was kind of like, "Oh, I'm setting up a baby shop," or, "I'm setting up something for pets." And it's like, that's not what all women are doing, right?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

So, we didn't go for those funds at all. We actually went completely after the hardcore, the best of the best out there. And again, like with everything else I've done I haven't really thought about being a woman, but it did open some doors.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, and you also have clear ideas of what you are doing with your company. So, one of the things that's interesting; now not every one can have a CFO be their husband, but that speaks to you, perhaps, I might assume, a trusted relationship. So maybe speak a little bit more about that in terms of the teamwork that you have with your husband CFO and how that's helpful for building out your vision and your plan for your company.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Yeah. I mean, first of all, I will say, if you don't work with your husband I think you can still be successful. Just make sure you surround yourself with really good people that can support you. So we have a great chief growth officer, a great chief customer officer, and so we have a team around me that supports me. But absolutely it helps to work with your husband, or at least make sure you have somebody who can support you because you come home and at night, being able to talk and discuss some of those things and help make sure that... that the people that support you understand what you're doing, I think is very helpful. For me and my husband working together, we've been lucky because I'm the physician, I'm the visionary, I'm the product sales person. And he's an accountant, an MBA, so he's doing all the other things that I find as boring. And so we complement each other really, really well.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. You've got a great partnership but you've also surrounded yourself with a strong team. This has been really terrific in terms of the conversation. I just appreciate it so much. As we close out here on Inspiring Women, do you have any last sort of thoughts or closing advice you might give to younger women who are starting out, who like you might be innovative or entrepreneurs? Any last thoughts?

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

I think it's important if you don't have the support from home or in your personal life, go find yourself a mentor. A woman that has been successful can help you a lot, just being that sounding board. I think that's something that I would do if I didn't have it at home.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, this has been just terrific. I so appreciate this conversation. We have been speaking on Inspiring Women with Dr. Monica Bolbjerg. And thank you so much.

Dr. Monica Bolbjerg:

Thank you.

Laurie McGraw:

This has been an episode of Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. Please subscribe, rate and review. We are produced by Kate Kruse at Executive Podcast Solutions. More episodes can be found on [inspiringwomen.show](http://inspiringwomen.show). I am Laurie McGraw, and thank you for listening.