**SWiM Inspiring Stories**

**Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea AM**

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**TRANSCRIPT**

NATALIE HANNAN

So firstly, I would like to start by acknowledging that today I'm on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years, and I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and also the Traditional Owners of the lands that you are situated on today, and I'm sure they're varied. So I like to pay our respects there also. And welcome to all of you for this final Inspiring Story session for 2020, I'm Associate Professor Natalie Hannan, I'm the Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. And I believe we have the right to a fair and equitable workplace, where gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, disability, mental health issues, and an individual's background or race, should not be a barrier to them reaching their full potential. We are surrounded by impressive and accomplished women breaking barriers and challenging the status quo regarding women and what women can achieve. And yet in 2020 women still remain underrepresented at the leadership level within our faculty. And I really hope that by having conversations that inspire leadership from within, that this will not only support our talented women in MDHS to reach their full potential, but also shine a very important light on the barriers that women face. And so with no further ado I'm really thrilled to welcome today a very inspiring woman known to so many in STEM, Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea AM. Dr Evans-Galea, fondly known to many of us as Maggie, is a scientist, executive and entrepreneur. She is the Executive Director of the Industry Mentoring Network in STEM, so IMNIS for short. Many of you will know about IMNIS, an industry engagement initiative of the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering. She is also Co-Founder and Co-Chair of Women in STEMM Australia, and is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Paediatrics here within the Faculty. She has led research in cell and gene therapy at world-leading organisations in the U.S. and here in Australia. Her research and her leadership have been internationally recognised with numerous prestigious awards. She is currently the Associate Editor of Australasian Gene Therapy, a Springer Nature journal. She has served on STEM research and workforce advisory groups, boards and committees, and is currently the chair of Australian Sickle Cell Advocacy Incorporated. She's a leading voice, a very important leading voice, and advocate for STEM research, innovation, inclusion and diversity, and was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia last year for her outstanding service to women in STEM as both an advocate and a role model. Maggie, I'm just so grateful to be able to share this conversation with you today. You are a true inspiration to me, and I know to many of our audience that have joined us today.

Marguerite Evans-Galea

I'm completely floored that is a beautiful introduction. And thank you for warning me that I would have to sit through my entire bio because it is a journey to sit there and listen to the things that you accomplished but it's also very rewarding. So thank you again for having me. I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners as well of the lands on which we all connect today. It's really important, particularly if we have STEM professionals or students online, to say hello, so thank you.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yes, that is great, thanks for echoing that. Yes, I didn't want to leave anything out because too often our accomplishments and achievements are overlooked particularly as women as we've seen recently in the media. And one thing right now at the moment I think for many women in our Faculty after this tumultuous year that we've had, the university sector has not been spared, and medical research funding is critical right now. And we are feeling for many that it is perhaps at an all-time low from the majority of the medical researchers. So I was hoping you might be able to share with us some... maybe a time in your career where you've had uncertainty yourself, around your career path and your future direction.

Marguerite Evans-Galea

Sure, so two times come to mind. The first was a really difficult time. The second was difficult, but much better handled, I guess is how I'd put it. The first time was here in Australia, back in 2011 my funding was coming to completion and I had been warned well in advance that should the funding not come through, you would be finishing up at the end of the year. Now as a scientist we identify with what we do. Every day we pour everything into it as a researcher, I was no different and you absolutely identify with everything you do on a daily basis. You're incredibly committed to the work that you do, you're committed to the people that you're trying to help through your work. And so I was finding this whole concept of, you know this is the end of my career, this is the end of my future. This is the end of my ability to create change, this is the end of my impact as a scientist. And thankfully I was very wrong, but that was the mindset, right? And part of the reason for that mindset is because that's how it's sold to us, it is everything that we do as it rightfully, should be, right? It's not to take that away, but I think it's really important for today's researchers that have a different lens on how we see our future, in STEM and in research. And so in 2011, I probably went through a pretty down phase. You know, I found it really difficult. However, I took some time out over the Christmas break and I came back in the new year and I said, "I wanna keep going, I'm Honorary, I'm gonna keep going, I'm gonna keep doing my research, I'm going to resubmit all my grants and I'm gonna do it." And I had 100% support from the people around me, but I had no salary, so I was in a privileged position. I call this my gap year and I was in a privileged position because my husband was still working, he's a scientist too. And so it allowed me to, you know, be a supportive spouse and to do this kind of thing where I could get back in the lab, generate some more data, resubmit the grants, follow up with rebuttals, have that data for rebuttals. And then after that I took six months to go and do other things, and so I learnt a lot about policy careers, I kick-started the Early- and Mid-Career Researcher Forum in a big way. And I met with ministers, I met with advocates, I organised national symposiums, I held focus groups, et cetera, et cetera. So I complimented my skills in other ways through the work I was already volunteering with. But in that time, it sort of it started to occur to me what would happen if that research funding came up, how will I feel, you know starting to find this new path. And the research funding did get up. And I was so excited to have NHMRC funding for four more years and of course I jumped straight back into it, and I was in for another four years. And everything was looking very positive.

However, the writing was on the wall again. You know, success rates continued to plummet as they have continued to plummet since I've exited as well. And I can see the writing on the wall very clearly, so this was a very strategic exit this time. It was very much, okay this isn't going to be a last minute crisis of identity. This is going to be a well thought out decision-making process, and I was much more strategic in how I exited. So back in March, I flagged, you know should the funding not get off I will go, I will not do this again. Drawing that line for myself and my family and my colleagues around me, and we planned from there and that's exactly what I chose to do in the end. I chose to leave. I still had some funding when I exited and I still chose to leave because it felt right. And I was ready, I was mentally prepared for it. And I could see, having thought this out, because through my research, I wanted to help people, I could help people from anywhere in the STEM ecosystem. I could have impact anywhere in the STEM sector, and that made all the difference, and that's why it's so important for us to know our why, why are we doing something? What are our key drivers for our day-to-day basis? And it's really critical right now with a whole bunch of uncertainty ahead to every young person I speak to, to every mid-career woman I speak to. I say, know your key drivers, know your why to help you with your decision-making process going forward. Make it an informed choice, don't make it an emotional identity one if that makes sense.

NATALIE HANNAN

Yes, and I wanted to touch on that. You've actually written a wonderful piece on knowing your why, and you've just articulated some of what I was gonna ask you. But I think if you could sum it up for, especially for women in STEM, what's the critical need to know your why? Do you think that if we don't have this understanding in our own self that we could get, as you say, lost in what we think is right, and following this trail of academia. So knowing your why is really critical for progressing your passion and purpose, right? It's really critical for that, it's also really critical for resilience building for yourself. And I'm not talking about when someone treats you badly and you can bounce back from that. For me it's internal, my own internal resilience, How do I navigate decision-making processes like the ones I've just described? And I can tell you at those two different points in time they were very, very, very different. And so the second time was much more positive, much more strategic, much more informed because I'd identified my true why. What was I trying to do, who was I trying to help? I just want to help people, I want to contribute to the greater good. And I knew that I could do that from anywhere. If you don't know that, you can get caught up into this stereotype of success. And this is a male-dominated stereotype of success, right? Where it's the white, Caucasian man with glasses in a lab coat, right? That's success in science. That's not what it looks like, at all, and we know that. And it's important that we don't, you know, embody that ourselves and embed that into our thinking, our culture, and be completely driven by KPIs like grants and publications. We have to continually shift that conversation and say, actually, success looks like a lot of different things. Success looks like a good mentor, a good teacher, you know a good person who gets in and backs that person or sponsor is the word I'm looking for. So, you know, there are so many other ways that we can be good scientists through collaboration through impact, through communication. And those things are not yet valued to the same extent as our grants and publications and yet there are an equal valid measure of success.

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

That's right, exactly. And in the Faculty I'm trying to look at now ways that we can actually measure the other things that you were talking about: that mentoring, generating or nurturing that next generation of amazing innovative thinkers who are going to come up with that cure. It doesn't mean just because you yourself don't do it, but if you bring on the next generation and you nurture them, support them, be an ally, be a sponsor, mentor them, I think that's incredibly important. And it's something that you're doing a lot through IMNIS and also Women in STEMM Australia. And I know you're also involved in other programs as well. It's obviously a big passion for you there and it's critical for women I think particularly because we don't have all of these opportunities necessarily often - we have to leave early or can't make an extra meeting if we've got caring responsibilities, there's various other things. What are your thoughts on sponsorship? And for those of us who need a sponsor, how do we, you know, is there some tips or tricks you can give us there? And also for those of us in the audience that have made it and here to watch and support the next generation, how can they sponsor the next generation?

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
This is a really good area to explore. I think because sponsorship can make the difference, it can make or break your career essentially. And basically I see mentoring as the door to sponsorship, and therefore mentoring is critical because without a level of mentoring, you don't even get the opportunity to connect with someone who gets to know you and gets to know your strengths and weaknesses, and gets to know your individual context of your situation, your dreams, your hopes, your aspirations, that are unique to you. And so if you never have those conversations with someone, they're never going to be able to sponsor you because the most effective sponsorship... to me there is levels of sponsorship if you like, and there's sponsorship light, if you like, and I'll do this for almost any woman in STEM. I will do sponsorship light: I will cheer her on, I will champion her, I will put her out there. I will retweet her tweets, I will put her posts up if it's a really, you know, resonates with me. And I think that's what people really love on social media is that willingness, I'm very willing to share and increase their profile through my profile. So I leverage mine to amplify others and it's a very simple way but it's an act of sponsorship because it goes beyond. It's an active, time-consuming approach, not a simple passive type of thing that occurs. And so through IMNIS it's very much and through Women in STEM Australia, when I connect to people... to be a connector is a very privileged position because you have an understanding of who this person is and I've honed it now that I can ask the right questions to understand very quickly what do they actually want in a mentor? Or what are they actually looking for in terms of support and who is the best person to provide that? Usually they write to me first saying, 'Can you be my mentor? Can you be my sponsor? Well, no, I can't do that for everyone unfortunately, I don't have that...

I'd be so addicted to coffee. However, it allows me then to have that conversation. I don't just delete those emails, I go back and I say, 'Actually, I may not even be the best person for you. Tell me what you're after, let's talk about it a little bit more'. And I will take that few minutes just to bounce some ideas, and then I'll say, 'Actually, I can introduce you to this person. It doesn't guarantee that anything's going to happen, it's a conversation starter for you two to go and have'. That's such a simple thing to do

- That's so incredibly powerful, it's connecting someone with the right person that is...

We all have networks, right? And all of our colleagues are gonna have their own networks and their own collaborators. And all you have to do is say, 'Would you be able to introduce me to that person?' And then that person to actually be willing to say, 'Yes, I will. You're my colleague, I'll do it'. Right? And I don't think we do that enough for each other because we do tend to get very insular and very focused on ourselves. I remember my first ever international conference and I had a postdoc nearby, who I knew, and I'd gotten to know through my different research areas. And he actually said to me, 'Come on, I'll introduce you to a few people'. And I was kind of wishing my supervisor had done it in retrospect, but at the end of the day, you know, this very senior postdoc was very willing to be generous and to walk me around the room and say, 'Hey, you know there's a PhD student in our lab, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah'. And it was the most effective thing because it landed me my postdoc over in the U.S. at the end of the day at that meeting, at that conference. And it was purely because, you know we'd gotten out there and I'd said to someone come and see my poster and I showed them my poster and then the conversation continued. So I think, you know, we don't realise the impact we can have through sharing our networks. And something as simple as that can lead, ultimately to sponsorship.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
Yes, I agree so much with this. And it resonates with me on a personal level. I think had that postdoc not done that for you. You just do not know what the story would have been. So I think as well, for many of us who might still think we still have a lot that we have to gain from this career and we're still on that path ourselves, we have so much to offer other people as well...

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

Oh so much, we can be an ally for each other.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

Exactly, and also even peers. So even just supporting your peers sometimes to connect them with someone who could help drive their work or...

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

Some of the best mentoring I've had is through my peers. You know, I have deeply valued bouncing ideas with someone who's at a similar age and stage or whatever, you know, life journey.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

Yes, no, I think it's incredibly important. And we've recently launched a strategic mentoring program specifically for academic promotion as part of the Supporting Women in MDHS because we're looking at our numbers of women at level E and level D and so we are wanting to change that. And I know that there's also several other mentoring programs that women can sign up for out in STEM and also just, I guess, in the community as well, some are free and some cost. But I wondered if you had any further tips or insights on mentoring programs that you think work well.

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

think it really depends on you and your individual needs to be honest, because for some people a structured program doesn't work very well. They prefer the organic approach, right? So we need to be offering a suite of opportunities to people, for them to be able to find their right fit. And so I always encourage that, that's partly why through IMNIS we do have those networking opportunities where we invite external folks in and it's very public. And we say, come on in and connect with these amazing people. But a structured program can really work for people who are a little shy, who may not speak English as their first language, who have come either interstate from a rural region or international. It's a terrific way to break into a network, start to understand the culture around you, and then to connect with other people who are in the same boat basically. And so I think, I think I would say to people don't just apply to any mentoring program. I would say, what are you gonna get out of it? So in this untimely offers industry-based mentoring, right? We don't focus on academia, we help you connect with industry as an academic, but it's not about writing grants or, you know, strategic development for the academic you know, career pathway, which is very much what the Franklin Women Mentoring Program focuses on. The Superstars of STEM and is very focused on building your public profile, and putting you out as a superstar for, you know, the media spotlight so that you are on TV on a regular basis, you are in the newspapers. So I think it just depends on what you're after and what you think you need, and so it'd be a little more, you know, do your homework.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

I think that's really important for us and I think that's what's been happening now. We're having more tailored approaches in the programs, and it's why we wanted, in the Faculty, to deal with promotion as a complete strategic point, because otherwise you could talk about so many things but if we're talking a set time period and a set goal I think that can be really helpful.

Yes, and I guess one thing I would like your input on is, and many people ask me this, how do they get a mentor? I seem to tell people just to go out and be confident. And as you say that person's not the right person they may know someone who would be really good to mentor them. Do you think the same thing, would you ever think badly of someone? I certainly wouldn't, but to come up and ask for a mentor, because at the end of the day, if they're not advocating for themselves and seeking themselves. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

It’s really, really critical that you believe in yourself first, otherwise nobody else will. So you've gotta be your own best advocate. But I actually encourage people not just to network and put themselves out there. It's not always easy to do that if you don't have the tools and the know how to do that. So I encourage folks to also then network locally first so that you build those skills and you never know you may actually find a great mentor on your floor, you know, who can help you get started. I think it depends on what you think a mentor is versus what a mentor actually would be to you. So it's about expectations as well, and managing those expectations, a lot of people want to sponsor straight away. They have to get to know you because sponsorship carries risks. Sponsorship heavy as I would call it, carries risk, it requires me to understand someone's strengths and needs, know what they're capable of for me to be able to champion them outside of the organisation and in a public way, otherwise I won't do it. Because it's my reputation on the line, and so therefore I think folks can get in, they can network they can connect locally, they can connect outside of their organisation, they can connect across sectors but you can also volunteer on a committee. You know, you can put your hand up to say 'I'll organise that seminar, I'll help you do this scientific organisation for this symposium'. You know, there's lots of ways you can connect with people, and that's the key to finding a mentor as far as I'm concerned, because it's about people who resonate with you, have like-minded things in common and then you are able to have a conversation with them. So you have those interpersonal communication, technical skills, and if you wanna go business acumen, then you know that's a more strategic, targeted approach.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
Yes, and you could also have several mentors for different aspects of your career.

**Marguerite Evans-Galea**

Team of mentors!

**NATALIE HANNAN**

Yes, exactly and then I guess not relying on one for everything as well. So then, you know, the spread of the support is there throughout many and I think that can be particularly strong as well. So not thinking you have to just have one and only person you'd follow their advice and trust. Having several for different kinds of things for within your career, I think is really important.

So I just wanted to give a huge thanks to Maggie. So much for joining us today and sharing with us her incredible insights about the importance of allyship, sponsorship and mentoring. And I hope you've enjoyed the inspiring stories that we've started this year in 2020, we look forward to bringing more important conversations with inspiring leaders in 2021 in the hope to move toward gender equity for our faculty.

And so these will begin in March next year, we're having a little bit of a break over the, I guess, the festive season and the early new year where things get back up and running. And we've had some wonderful speakers this year, I hope that you've been able to tune in. If you haven't... videos with the conversation will be on the website, the SWiM webpage, and we've got some really exciting speakers for next year already lined up. So I just want to thank you all for joining us in this really important conversation, the conversations that we've been having particularly today and yes, thank you all. Hope you have a great rest of your day. Enjoy some sunshine and looking forward to seeing you all next year, thank you.