



Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 58

Chani Cordero

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we learn about the people that are on the front lines, delivering and protecting patient care. I'm Ed Gaudet, the host of our program, and today I am pleased to be joined by Chani Cordero, Chief Information officer at Brooke Army Medical Center. Welcome, Chani.

Chani Cordero: Thank you. Thank you. I really appreciate the invitation to be on this afternoon.

Ed Gaudet: Yes. Thank you for joining us. I did some research on your impressive background, a lot of years in healthcare and IT. So, let's just jump right in. What tell us about your current role and your current organization?

Chani Cordero: Sure, sure. Happy to share. First, before I start, I have to do my standard disclaimer. I am not part of the military health system, and so I have to just put a disclaimer out there that these views that I share today are my own and that they're my own experiences. And it's not a reflection upon the Department of Defense or the Defense Health Agency. But with that being said, I'm happy to serve as a Chief Information Officer at Brooke Army Medical Center here in San Antonio, Texas. We're a 425-bed level one trauma hospital, and we have a full range of services, you know, from primary ambulatory care up into end-of-life care.



Chani Cordero (cont'd): We have tons of specialties that are world renown, like our world-renowned burn center, our centers, in retrospect, and then, of course, all of our specialty surgeries, specialty clinics ranging from a GI to oncology to pediatric services, we're a little bit different than most military treatment hospitals because we are a level one trauma hospital. We actually see a civilian in our facility, which is unusual, but we service half of San Antonio along with the other high-level one trauma hospital. And so we have some unique perspectives as we have different classes of beneficiaries that's available for care in our system.

Ed Gaudet: Okay, great. And how did she get into healthcare?

Chani Cordero: And it actually kind of a funny story because I started out as a med school hopeful. And so I have a degree in chemistry. And while I was going to college, you know, I heard about the Army and about scholarships, and I always wanted to serve my mom and my both my parents, I should say, or our proud veterans. And so, I decided to join a military as a reservist. And so I was in college, my job as a reservist was an operating room technician. And so I was working at the mall and said, hey, instead of working at the mall, why don't you go actually work as an operating room technician? I did, and while I was working at a hospital here in San Antonio, and I had to deal with some really sick patients, and the last patient made me realize that I don't know if I actually want to be around sick people. Now I'm a junior in college with this degree in chemistry. And so I realized that I still want to be in the business of healthcare, but maybe not in the direct patient care. And you know what I used to do on my own time, and it's just the 90s, right? And so, figuring out what I could do with automation was always fascinating to me. But I realized why would I not do something in IT, which is my natural interest. I mean, some girls like to go to shoe stores. I like to go to Best Buy when I'm bored. Right? This is how I marry both my love for healthcare without actually touching a patient with my love of IT.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. That's great. And you can still obviously make a huge impact on the healthcare side with IT, which is fantastic. So as you think about the last couple of years, been tough for a lot of folks in healthcare. What are your top three priorities or strategic initiatives over the next two years?

Chani Cordero: Thanks for asking because healthcare and IT are the two top industries that just constant change. And as you mentioned, with COVID, really putting a strain on not just on a medical care or resources, but the most important resource is people. It puts such a strain on people. And now you marry with technology that changes so quickly. Right. Moore's Law, right? It changes exponentially. Hence technology. That was great five years ago. It's obsolete now. Right. And so, as for me, as a CIO, I look at how do I build for the future. I need to focus on the infrastructure. Right? Because if you don't have the ground is not ready, then how are you going to onboard new technologies? And so we're looking at how do we upgrade our facilities from cabling from cellular service and network services. So that we will be prepared for the next generation of automation tools. That's probably in development as we speak. Right?

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Chani Cordero: So that's one area that we're looking at. Second area, though is that healthcare is also consumed by lack of resources. And so, what do we look at in our portfolio and see how do we streamline and be more efficient with the tools that we have?, And so how do we optimize the maybe the tool A does A, B, and C? Does B, C, A and maybe a little bit of e. Can I sunset one of these and save the organization some resources? And the third thing is just growing our bench. And that's what I talk about on my other side; my other duty of being a consultant to the Army Surgeon General for healthcare CIOs is how do I prepare the next generation of healthcare CIOs. What type of training and competencies do we need to look at now so that our force is prepared for the challenges that will be coming about?

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, I love that. And your background, where you spent time as an adjunct professor, I think really plays into that. That mix of education as well as leadership and technology is so critical to our industry.

Chani Cordero: Definitely.

Ed Gaudet: When you mentioned a couple of letters there earlier, what about the letters A and I, or are you looking at AI in any in any way at the health system?



Chani Cordero: We are, of course, it's always been there. Right? And we've always had machine learning of some capacity and some automation tools. And this is like the new buzz, the new, the buzzwords like used to be the blockchain.

Ed Gaudet: Right.

Chani Cordero: And right now, it's like A.I., but really what we mean is ChatGPT, right? And being able to take that natural language processing and doing something with it. And, of course, this being part of the DoD, I'm limited to federal law when it comes to what tools that we use, if it's on-premise or if it's on a cloud. And so there is some initiatives that I am working with, our version of corporate, right? Our headquarters, that I have made it as use cases that I think that would be prime for AI right now. It's not in the clinical domain; it's more in the administrative function that would help the clinician on the back end. But you know, how do we use like robotic processing to eliminate some like mindless tasks that maybe a clerk used into how do we make our policies a little bit more easier to read, but also available for our staff members?

Ed Gaudet: Chani, you've got a lot on your plate. What keeps you up at night?

Chani Cordero: What keeps me up at night? Not being on CNN.

Ed Gaudet: I love that answer.

Chani Cordero: About not having a major breach or whatnot. But you know, I say that in jest. But truthfully, what's unique about healthcare and security? There's a balance. I mean, you want to make sure that your hospital is protected, you want to make sure your patients are protected, but you also want to make sure that patient care delivery is deliberate and that the service that the security doesn't outrun the service. And so what keeps me up at night is that we in the IT community failed a patient because we were more worried and concerned about the technology instead of the care that was delivered.

Ed Gaudet: I love that. You got the balance wrong. Let's get the balance. Yeah, I love that. So true.



Ed Gaudet (cont'd): Sometimes, we miss the forest through the trees. We're dealing with these technology initiatives or whatever. And then patients are going without care, which is a real problem. Great point. So we mentioned the pandemic tough couple of years. What are you most proud of over the last year, personally or professionally, and or.

Chani Cordero: Honestly, I would actually have to say my own personal growth. I mean, as leaders, we are taught how to lead and you kind of stick to your principles and how I changed my leadership style because of the pandemic. I was kind of brought up in that old school that if I don't see the whites of your eyes, you're not working. And then I went to the opposite then, oh, everybody can work at home. And so, a personal growth in saying is that I need to adjust my leadership style to the times that we're in. And so because of that, I had to do some self-reflection to say, hey, Chani, the way you will handle that situation, you could have done it differently. And you need to think about the generation that's coming into the workforce now and that people's mindset has changed. Does it mean that they're less dedicated and they're not? They don't care anymore. It's just that some of their focus is more onto themselves. And that's okay because a happy employee is going to be or you're happier at home, you're going to be happier at work. And so I have learned again to change my style and actually also say, maybe I could have done it differently.

Ed Gaudet: I love that, and I love that you pointed out that this generation is really forcing the change, driving the change that we haven't seen in a long time, and getting folks like myself who've been in business for a long time to really think differently and reflect upon like you said, my leadership style, the way I handled things in the past and how to manage this hybrid or fully remote situation with employees, which are right. Years ago, I would have said, no way. I used to joke you can take all the time off you want on Friday or on Saturday and Sunday.

Chani Cordero: Yeah, that's your job. Like.

Ed Gaudet: But now.

Chani Cordero: We're a little short Sunday.

Ed Gaudet: That's right. You could do it. You could do it Saturday and Sunday work well. And now you have to actually embrace it and figure out how to build culture through it and with it. And so that's a really great point. So, outside of healthcare, outside of IT, outside of the military, what would you be doing? What's your passion?

Chani Cordero: I really do love the field of healthcare and IT, which is why I spend a lot of time on it. But at home, funny enough, I actually like to have a vegetable garden. Yeah, there's something so bland and boring, but I really like to grow. I just like to grow food. I like the idea of growing something that I can eat.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. And no, that's great. And it's so connected to things that were not connected to when we were doing our day job, which the earth and, like you said, patience of watching the growth and then applying it to our food, which is fantastic. I love that.

Chani Cordero: And just having reward and being able to say, hey, I did that, and I even like picking weeds. Believe it or not, it's such a stress reliever.

Ed Gaudet: I do not like picking weeds, but I could see it though. Yeah, I do get frustrated when I see them. That's great. So if you could go back in time, what would you tell your 20-year-old self?

Chani Cordero: I would tell your 20-year-old self to believe in yourself. I think that I know a lot of women, in particular, suffer from the, what do you call it, the syndrome? I can't think of the name of it, but it's basically where you feel like you're faking it and that you don't deserve to be there. And so I spent a lot of time in I have a lot of education and certifications because I wanted to. I felt like I had to do that to prove that I deserved to be at the table, and not based on just my knowledge and my experience. And don't get me wrong, those other opportunities allowed to augment my knowledge. But I also did it as a way of validating that I deserved to be there. And that's expensive.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's such a great story to go and tell other women. I have three daughters and I'm constantly reminding them to believe in yourself. Do the work, it'll pay off. Stay focused on what matters. Don't sweat the small stuff. And that's really powerful. I love that.

Chani Cordero: Imposter syndrome.

Ed Gaudet: Imposter syndrome? Yes.

Chani Cordero: Imposter syndrome. Right?

Ed Gaudet: Yes, I have that some days.

Chani Cordero: Yeah. No, definitely. It's definitely not just limited to women in particular. Absolutely. Everybody feels like why? Like, why am I here? Like, why do they invite me?

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. No, I know, and I think I share it with you, I write poetry when I'm not doing this. And I always feel like when I'm amidst among other poets. What am I doing here? Yeah. I would be remiss if I didn't ask you this question. This is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. What is the riskiest thing you've ever done?

Chani Cordero: Oh, the riskiest thing I ever done. Probably. So I had a near-drowning incident when I was a kid. And so I know this doesn't sound like terribly risky to anybody, but for me, it was to jump in the ocean. Just I mean, obviously that's with friends and everybody nearby. But I was scared to death because of my, you know, I mean, this fear. And I was taking swimming lessons and my children are champion swimmers, competitive swimmers, I should say. But for me to be able to take that first jump into the ocean and not die internally.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Chani Cordero: And that was, well, maybe 20 years ago. But since then even I just recently just came from the Caribbean and snorkeling and jumped in the ocean and were on a sandbar far away from the shore. And even that, that eternal alarm is in my head, but still being a divide through that. Because how much I really enjoyed that activity.

Ed Gaudet: I bet. Yeah, it must be with you. Must stay with you as a sort of a reminder. It's interesting how we carry those things with us forever. Thank you for sharing that. And so I think we had a couple of questions about music and books and movies. So I don't know if you've ever heard this question before, but if you're on a desert island and you can only bring five books or five movies or five albums, what would they be?

Chani Cordero: Yeah, so I'm a huge Michael Jackson fan.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, excellent. Excellent.

Chani Cordero: The Michael Jackson collection. For movies, there's a movie called Peggy Sue Got Married, and it's like one of those very unheard-of movies. But I really enjoy it because it talks about she's a woman who has amnesia, wakes up, kind of relives the same mistakes that she made in high school. But it makes me think about how we purposely make mistakes. But how do we learn from them? And it's okay to make mistakes, right? It's okay.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent. Yeah, that's a good movie. Yep.

Chani Cordero: I also love the movie Crimson Tide.

Ed Gaudet: Oh yeah. Crimson Tide.

Chani Cordero: It's a great leadership movie. Just about being right. But also having relationships and what that means. And how do you lead others and how you not lead others?

Ed Gaudet: That's was that Nick Nolte in?

Chani Cordero: Was it Nick Nolte? So I know it was Denzel Washington and Gene Hackman was in.

Ed Gaudet: Ah, okay. Okay, good.



Chani Cordero: Yes.

Ed Gaudet: I have to go back and look. I haven't seen that movie in years. That's a good one to go back to.

Chani Cordero: And my other favorite movie is called Riding in Cars With Boys. And again, it's one of those very, very small movie.

Ed Gaudet: I have not seen that I have to take a note of that one.

Chani Cordero: And it's raining roses in that one. Yeah, right. The E.T. girl now.

Ed Gaudet: Okay, I'll check it out.

Chani Cordero: But she's in and and again in this movie is about choices. And the main line of the movie is that life is about 4 or 5 incidences. That actually is the trajectory of your life just from those 4 or 5 incidences. And I always read a kind of reflective on that. This was the moment that my life went A versus B, right?

Ed Gaudet: I agree, I think that's interesting. That's an interesting way to reflect on your life, because I was just thinking about it the other day, how profound going into the military was in my life. And if I hadn't gone and there's a whole back story there, I can't imagine where I'd be today. I just it was so pinnacle in terms of a turning point in my life. But that's really good. I have to go back and check out that movie too, which just about ready to wrap up. What advice would you give to cyber professionals that are maybe just starting out in this industry, or looking at healthcare and a general path in this profession.

Chani Cordero: No. Excellent question. Because I get a lot of cyber professionals asking for mentorship, and I'm happy to do so. And I think the biggest part is doing it because you actually have an interest in the field and not doing it just because it's the hottest field that makes you money. It is something that's easily burnt out.



Chani Cordero (cont'd): You're always fighting for resources and dollars and to be honest with you, relevancy being relevant.

Ed Gaudet: Yes. Yeah.

Chani Cordero: Most people could care less what you say or do. I mean, I know this is a listener school of cyber folks, but I actually despise security.

Ed Gaudet: We all despise security, by the way.

Chani Cordero: But it's always like the one thing that's in your way, right?

Ed Gaudet: I know.

Chani Cordero: Myself learned my system and security plus because I made myself understand it and learn and understand my risk tolerance or whatnot. But it's not something I enjoy. So yeah, my cyber team here, I have seven dedicated professionals and they love it and they're fighting. Their face lights up when we talk about it, and obviously, we don't want a breach or anything like that. But when they have the opportunity to shine, they do and they do a great job at it.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. And it goes back to that balance of making sure that you're not just enforcing those controls, but also enabling the business to do its job. And like you said, take care of patients if we're secure at 100%, but we can't care for patients, that's obviously not a good balance. All right.

Chani Cordero: Record is safe, but you're probably going to die.

Ed Gaudet: That's right, that's right, that's right. We protected your identity. Yeah, that's great that's great. That's a great way to end Chani, thank you so much for joining the program today. I really appreciate it. It's great to have you on and listen to your story in your background.



Ed Gaudet (cont'd): This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. If you're on the frontlines protecting patients and delivering patient care, remember to stay vigilant because risk never sleeps.



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