



## **Mental Health Champions: Why & How Dr David Mahjoubi Is Helping To Champion Mental Wellness**

Michelle Tennant Nicholson | April 24, 2023



*As a part of our series about Mental Health Champions helping to promote mental wellness, I had the pleasure to interview **David Mahjoubi**.*

*David Mahjoubi, MD is a board-certified Anesthesiologist and one of the most sought-after experts in Ketamine treatments for the healing of anxiety, PTSD, Major Depression, substance abuse and chronic pain. His practice, Ketamine Healing Clinic of Los Angeles, is one of the first Ketamine-only treatment centers in the country helping patients nationwide. Dr. Mahjoubi currently serves as the president of the American Board of Ketamine Physicians (ABKP), is a published author and one of the most trusted sources on the subject matter of IV and at-home Ketamine treatments.*

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit. Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?**

I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, which is in Los Angeles, CA, playing all kinds of sports while having a strong curiosity for math and the sciences. I would ride my bike to Walden Books (no



longer open but like a present day Barnes and Noble), and read books on anatomy and physiology. This sparked my interest in junior high and high school, but I decided to remain open minded until after my first year of college at the University of California, at Irvine. My freshman year in college I took all sorts of courses, from philosophy, to criminology, to chemistry, and biology. After volunteering Friday nights in the Emergency Room of Western Medical Center in Santa Ana, I decided medicine was my calling.

**You are currently leading an initiative that is helping to promote mental wellness. Can you tell us a bit more specifically about what you are trying to address?**

While I treat patients with various mood and pain conditions, my primary focus is fourfold: to help those who no longer find their psychotropic meds have any positive benefits, those who are having intolerable side effects from their psychotropic medications, individuals with chronic pain who don't want to use opiates, and those who have PTSD for which traditional therapy and meds are not sufficiently effective. I'm passionate about these four groups because they need the most help, and are the ones where traditional psychiatry (or pain management in the case of pain) is not enough to allow them to lead better lives.

**Can you tell us the backstory about what inspired you to originally feel passionate about this cause?**

Throughout my training in medical school, as well as continuing medical education, I always came across statistics which showed the relatively low efficacy for oral medications and therapy in treating anxiety, depression, PTSD and chronic pain. When I realized ketamine can treat all four of the aforementioned conditions, I felt it was only natural for me to make this a lifelong passion and help as many treatment-resistant patients as possible. After founding one of the first ketamine infusion clinics in the country over 8 years ago, new data started emerging about the efficacy of ketamine on mood. For pain, we have always known ketamine is effective, but new ways to treat pain with longer infusion times of ketamine is relatively new. Seeing how over 85% of my patients initially benefited from ketamine, this became my calling and I have continued to see patients throughout Southern California ever since.

**Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions, but never manifest them. They don't get up and just do it. But you did. Was there an "Aha Moment" that made you decide that you were actually going to step up and do it? What was that final trigger?**

My Aha moment was realizing that as an anesthesiologist I would be in an operating room full time and never be able to speak to patients — I felt a change was needed. When I learned that an anesthetic drug, one that I had used hundreds of times, could help patients live their best lives, I felt it was only natural for me to pivot into providing the best possible ketamine infusions to help patients with mental wellbeing. For me the missing piece was speaking with patients and hearing their stories.



**Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company or organization?**

I'd say the most interesting story was when a woman brought her boyfriend in for severe depression, anxiety, and alcoholism. He was extremely reluctant at first, and even complained about the cost of the treatment. After some convincing and asking his girlfriend to leave the room, he agreed to an infusion. Six years later he continues to see me a few times a year and touts ketamine as having saved his life and relationship.

**None of us can be successful without some help along the way. Did you have mentors or cheerleaders who helped you to succeed? Can you tell us a story about their influence?**

Originally, when I first started providing infusions, it was hard to find physicians who were willing to let me use office space. Two friends, Drs. Nadiv Samimi and Faisal Lalani were very supportive and accommodating and let me use their office space until I was able to open my own practice. We regularly still share notes and discuss optimizing ketamine protocols 8 years later. Of course, many of my patients were very supportive and encouraged me to continue. Most are friends to this day.

**According to Mental Health America's report, over 44 million Americans have a mental health condition. Yet there's still a stigma about mental illness. Can you share a few reasons you think this is so?**

The stigma around mental health largely revolves around a lack of understanding for what others may be going through. Many people think that if they feel good, then others should be able to as well, not taking into consideration another person's upbringing or family genetics. Many people have grown up in dysfunctional households. This may include having a parent who was emotionally or physically abusive, an alcoholic, or just absent. Others may have experienced trauma such as being bullied in school or a victim of sexual assault. All of these can put a person's "fight or flight" response on higher than normal alert, making it easier to have anxiety and depression.

**In your experience, what should a) individuals b) society, and c) the government do to better support people suffering from mental illness?**

First and foremost the government should mandate that insurance companies pay for ketamine treatment. It is an absolute travesty this is not the case currently. It is an even greater travesty that the FDA would approve Johnson and Johnson's ketamine spray for depression, but not generic ketamine. There is no difference in their efficiency, and in fact, many studies conclude that generic ketamine works better. As a society we should have greater empathy for one another, especially at a time where we seem to be a more divided nation than ever before. People need to understand that each one of us is going through at least one struggle, and that no one is perfect. Having empathy for one another would not only allow us to have a more peaceful society, but it would also contribute to our own inner peace.



**What are your 5 strategies you use to promote your own well-being and mental wellness? Can you please give a story or example for each?**

Here are the five ways I take care of my own well-being and mental wellness:

1. Consistent, moderate to high intensity exercise. The human body does not do well sitting idle. It's counter intuitive but it needs physical challenges to get better, and for you to feel better.
2. Getting out in nature. We, as humans, were not meant to exist in boxed structures. We need to get out in nature, hike, see streams, rivers, and/or the ocean.
3. Travel. When we travel we are able to step outside our high stress lives back home, and re-assess things. We also get to see how others live, and more often than not learn to appreciate what we have. Traveling also allows us to see how grand the world is, and how much beauty there is still to find.
4. A "time out" multiple times a week. What I mean by that is to be away from our phone, work, and any stressors in our life, and either meditate, take a walk, or read a book. The point is to disengage from anything that is a source of stress.
5. Deep human connections. Humans were not meant to live in isolation. Far too many times I meet people in my clinic who have no friends or deep connections with people. You don't need to have 20 best friends, but a few deep connections are necessary to feel happy. One of the reasons Denmark and many other countries have a lower incidence of depression is the sense of community that exists over there. People see cousins, uncles, aunts, and other family members regularly and have a human to human bond.



**What are your favorite books, podcasts, or resources that inspire you to be a mental health champion?**

Two of my favorite books are:

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk and Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brenne Brown.

I personally use an app called Insight Timer to help me meditate and destress. There are different meditations for different purposes and it really helps me reset after a long day or week.

**If you could tell other people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society, like you, what would you tell them?**

As a human species, we are really all in this together, and that leaving a legacy, a positive impact on the world is truly worthwhile. It's perfectly fine to make sure your needs are met, but everyone has a little time to be kinder to one another, and help someone in need when they need it.

**How can our readers follow you online?**

<http://ketaminehealing.com/>, or on social media at: [@Ketamine\\_healing\\_clinic](https://www.instagram.com/ketamine_healing_clinic)

<https://medium.com/authority-magazine/mental-health-champions-why-how-dr-david-mahjoubi-is-helping-to-champion-mental-wellness-44d47f5caa08>