

## Episode 1: An Interview with Dr. Eileen Dolan

**Speaker 1** [00:00:14] Hello and welcome to this episode of D&I Diaries, a podcast produced by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Biological Sciences Division at the University of Chicago. My name is Camilla Frost-Brewer, and I am one of the program managers for diversity and inclusion in the division, and I'll be one of your hosts for the show.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:33] And my name is Tobias Spears, and I will be your other host. And I serve as Assistant dean of diversity and inclusion in the division. Through this podcast, Camilla and I hope to highlight and showcase the diverse voices of everyday BSD-ers. We want to create a space to authentically and candidly share our DEI stories where we get to know one another outside of our professional roles. And finally, we hope to engage a coalition of listeners who value DEI and increase interest in DEI work and conversations across the BSD. So without further ado, let's begin the show.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:13] Hello, listeners, and welcome to this episode of D&I Diaries, the show that uncovers diverse stories in the BSD. We are your hosts, Camilla Frost-Brewer.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:23] Woop-woop and Tobias Spears.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:25] And today we are joined by Dr. Eileen Dolan. She is a professor of medicine and the deputy director for the University of Chicago Medicine Comprehensive Cancer Center. So thank you for joining us today.

**Speaker 3** [00:01:37] Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:38] And with that, I'm going to toss it over to Tobias to ask our first question.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:42] Yes, thank you. And I'm really excited today because this is one of our inaugural episodes. But also, Eileen, you are one of the first people that I met when I joined the BSD. I remember meeting with you and Dr. Vicki Prince in our P102 location. And I think we were either talking about pipeline or pathway initiatives or like Werner Reynolds, but it was something related to our desire to increase access to something. And so when we started thinking about this podcast, I thought about you immediately because I was like, I want to speak to Eileen because you've been someone who I think has been in the game for so long and has been really thinking about access and getting people onto the University of Chicago campus, whether that be staff, whether that be faculty or students. And so.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:35] Thank you.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:35] Yes. And so the first question I have for you today is to tell us about your work, what you do here at U. Chicago, and a little bit about how you came to the work.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:46] Sure. Well, I'm a faculty at the University of Chicago, as you know, and as most faculty, we have multiple jobs. So I do research. I do teaching. I do mentoring. I build pathway programs, as you mentioned. And I also am deputy director for the cancer center. And that's an administrative job that requires a lot of different skill sets. So in my research work, the work that I do is primarily in pharmacogenomics, and that is the

marriage between pharmacology and genomics. And what we try to do is identify patients' risk for adverse drug reactions. So we look at patients who are young adults or children who get chemotherapy, radiation, and we identify which genetic variants might make them more likely to have hearing loss tinnitus, which is a ringing or buzzing in the ear and peripheral neuropathy. And the reason why this group of individuals is so important to me is they have maybe 50 years ahead of them and their quality of life is very much affected by these adverse drug reactions. And so we try to figure out other modifiable factors. Are there ways that we can modify the dose in order to decrease the likelihood that they will have these adverse drug reactions? So that's my research. And then I teach a course that's called cancer health disparities. And this is for undergraduates; senior undergraduates as well as graduate students. To date I've taught over 400 students in this class, and it's becoming more popular, I think, because there's a lot of pre-meds that really want to learn about cancer health disparities. And the course really goes through genetics, biological factors, socioeconomic factors. How does structural racism play into cancer health disparities? How do things that are simple, like transportation, health insurance. So we really try to look at all the different facets of cancer health disparities and learn from each other as well as from outside speakers that we bring in. So that's my second job. And my third job is the deputy director of the Cancer Center. And that is a very sort of a big job in that we work in many different areas to try to bring more support to the cancer center. We're right now working on a large National Cancer Institute grant. This was an opportunity that kind of came along at the right time for me. I felt very much prepared for it because I had done a lot of work in different aspects of the cancer center. Prior to that, I was a leader for a program and I was also associate director for education. And I had also advised other cancer centers. So I really felt like this was a great position. I love working with Dr. Cuneo Duncy. He empowers the people that are around him. He really takes the team approach. So it's been a really great opportunity for me.

**Speaker 2** [00:05:59] Nice. Okay. So I will shift to Camilla for the next question.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:06] Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing about kind of the various buckets that your work fits into. So can you talk to us a little bit about how diversity, equity and inclusion connect to your work and how you might incorporate it or see it as integral to the work you do?

**Speaker 3** [00:06:22] Yeah, I can't think of any aspect of my work that does not include diversity, equity and inclusion and justice. It's been integral to all that I do. And I feel as though there's it's been a long time there's been a lack of diversity in cancer research, especially as you get to the postdoc and faculty level. So a passion of mine has really been to help to increase the workforce. And so when I became AD for education, I worked with Kathy Goss and Megan McKenna, and together we wrote multiple grants and also were able to get philanthropic money. And so we built programs for high school students, undergraduate and high school educators. And to date, we have 440 students that have gone through our program either at the University of Chicago or other centers. And 75% of those have ended up in a bachelor's program in college. And of those, 94% are in science, in the field of science. So this has been really exciting for us. We've really worked hard to create an environment where young people who would not normally have the opportunity to work in a lab come to the University of Chicago and work here. And I remember one of our students being so excited about working at the University of Chicago that she used to wear her badge when she went to Walmart and was on the bus because she wanted everyone to know, you know, I'm part of this institution.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:54] Thank you so much. That is excellent. And I think some of those personal stories, as well as the institutional safeguards that you are working towards, have put so many years of your career towards, are really integral to increasing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, which I love that you added to cancer centers as well as to places like the BSD.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:18] Yeah. So I do have a question about the South Side and working here, but one of the things I wanted to ask just from listening to you is you have a Ph.D. in a clinical department, right, where most folks are MDs. So thinking about this idea of inclusion, I mean, people feeling like they're part of a team. I know for me, having a PhD and working in STEM, I often have to talk to people about what I do, what it means. Yours is more research focused in terms of the work you do, but what does that look like for you?

**Speaker 3** [00:08:52] Well, that's a very interesting question. You know, there was a time when I thought, Do I really belong here? You know? I thought, if something happens to me, how soon will my clinical colleagues know that I'm not around? You know what I mean? Would it be a week, a month, a year? And so, you know, I had some sense that, you know, is this really where I belong? And I have to say that I sort of over the years have found that this has also offered me a lot of freedom. So, you know, I don't know if I was a Ph.D. in a very basic department, I would have had the opportunity to build these pathway programs. So that is one of the advantages to it. But now that I'm part of the cancer center, especially in my new role, I feel like I can't even be gone an hour without like, yeah, letting somebody know that, you know. So it's a very different feel now in my life than it was, you know, years ago when I was not doing this particular job.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:56] Yeah. So working on the South side, right, that, that is where we are and that's such an important piece because, you know, I think about even our conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion and justice with Iris, our boss, Dean Romero, she always situates it on the south side, right, because that contextualizes so much for us. And so I wanted to ask, how does working on the South Side of Chicago, a community made up mostly of black folks, black and brown folks, but mostly black folks, influence your work, if at all. And what does it mean for you in your position to be situated in this community?

**Speaker 3** [00:10:33] Well, you know, as you are aware, you know, our neighborhood is 75% black, 11% Hispanic. And so our community are, you know, sort of front door, back door, side door, are all individuals, you know, that are black and brown people that influence our work. And one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about is, you know, the life expectancy changes as you drive down Garfield, dramatically. And so it means to me we can't ignore the problem. You know, we can't say it's not here. It is here. You know, and so, you know, I often think about what Martin Luther King once said, and he said that of all forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane. And that's part of why I help to build the pathway programs, but why I teach this course in cancer health disparities. I really want to generate individuals that are going to medical school or on to their Ph.D. who are passionate about making a difference. You know, I'm not anymore at the beginning of my career. These individuals have a lot of time ahead of them, and they have an opportunity to make a huge difference by working in this particular field. So educating them in this areas is very important to me.

**Speaker 2** [00:11:55] Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:56] Wow. I am just blown away by that. I think it's rare that some folks kind of know the statistics because UChicago can kind of feel like its own little bubble, right? So knowing the statistics of our community really puts things into perspective and shows just how much of a lifetime commitment you have to DEI. So switching gears a little bit here, this is going to be maybe a more personal question. What is a moment or experience when you started to think differently about diversity, equity and inclusion, either personally or professionally?

**Speaker 3** [00:12:29] Well, I was co-chair of the BSD Diversity committee for several years, and I worked with Vicki Prince and Adam Hammond and a few others. And I remember after the death of George Floyd, we decided to have a town hall. Oh, Tobias, you were even there with the students. And I remember listening to the students and realizing the depth of anguish and pain in their voices. And I remember one student even saying the words, I feel like I'm drowning in grief. And it just all of a sudden affected me that I can't be a bystander to this. I can't stand over there and say this is their problem. This is not my problem. So I think that was a moment in my life that I just said, okay, even though you're doing a lot, you've been passionate about this. There's an urgency to it. And I read the book Caste, and that really affected me dramatically. I thought a lot about how our racism in our country influenced the Nazis, and how they set up the way they were going to be inhumane to others. And so and there were even things that in the book, they said, oh, we aren't even going to do that because they do that in America. But that's really horrible. You know what I mean? And so to me, I just thought, oh, my gosh, we were not proud of this. Of course, this isn't you know, our history is not something this particular part of our history is not something we're proud of. But we we really need to make a difference now, you know? And so that's kind of where this moment of. Yeah, kind of.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:22] Yeah. And it was such a it was such a turning point, right. I think for myself as a black man. Right. And lots of other black folks. Like, racial trauma doesn't ever really go away. It acts in waves. And so sometimes the wave is high. Sometimes the wave is low. Right. And I think we try to manage it. But this was a time where the wave was really high. Right. And I just remember so much going on at the time Floyd was murdered and Breonna Taylor and Lamont Arbery. It just felt like so much. And it was in the midst of COVID, right? So we were all just like we like, you know, day to day. We sort of were just taking it day to day. Right. Yeah. And I'm just I'm so glad that, you know, we like cultivated community and folks listened and we, you know, centered the students and wanted to figure out what they needed and what they wanted. So it was just such an interesting time. And I think that, you know, as we all look back at our professional careers and journeys and then we'll always remember that.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:27] Oh, yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:28] You know, that moment in the summer where it was just like.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:31] And I felt like I learned so much from the students. And I also came to the realization that, you know, my own privilege comes, you know, as a result of this structural racism. And, you know, that certainly didn't feel good. So I definitely felt like that was a turning point in my life.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:51] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:52] Yeah, Eileen, I really just want to mention you have uncovered so many things just in that story, right? There's like that feminist adage of the personal is

political, the personal is professional as well. We can't, especially as people of color, black people specifically, we cannot separate that piece when we come to work. We do not have that privilege, as you said. And I also want to just talk about the accountability that happens interpersonally and on like an individual level, that accountability doesn't feel good.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:26] It doesn't. No, no, no.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:28] You're right. No, it feels like guilt. It feels like pain. It feels like walking on it, walking aimlessly on a road to nowhere. But by holding ourselves accountable, we can be pushed into action.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:42] And it can feel good, right? It can feel good to be; it can feel good to know that you are accountable to something other than you, right? It can. And I think that in a lot of ways, right, that's part of what we try to do in the inclusion menu, right, is to help people understand that being part of a university means you're part of a community.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:02] Right.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:03] If you wanted to just be by yourself, that you wouldn't be at a university, right. And so, in a lot of ways, when you're at a university, it's our responsibility to prioritize those who are most vulnerable. Right. And those who are most vulnerable are the graduate students, right? And the postdocs right and the environmental service workers right. And so much of I think so much of us get pushed and prompted by this idea that we're a part of a larger community. Right. And sometimes that accountability is what pushes us to do like really great pathway work or really great work around different programs and initiatives.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:42] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:43] And what made me feel good was, oh my gosh, I thought I knew everything about this. And now I feel like I know very little, you know? So it was this sense of, I have so much more to learn and that these young people can teach us quite a bit about what, you know, what's really happening.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:59] Oh yeah, I love that adage. We should put that somewhere You're accountable and responsible to our shared community. I love that.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:07] Yeah, yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:08] Yeah. And it's it also speaks to like this, the kind of cultural responsiveness we talk about, right? Where part of what our job is to sort of understand that we don't know everything. And our job is to understand that everybody's culture is important to them. And, you know, because we don't know everyone's culture, sometimes we have to be the ones to sit back and listen right. And just be responsive to people's needs rather than like, tell people this is what you need. This is what I figured out, even when we hope positions of power.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:45] Exactly. You know. Yeah, that's a good point.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:47] So I will go to the next question, which is, was there ever a time when you had to show allyship or camaraderie for someone else? What was the experience like and what did you learn or take away from that moment?

**Speaker 3** [00:19:00] Well, you know, Tobias knows me well, and he knows that I'm non-confrontational. I like peace at all costs, whatever it is. So it is very difficult for me to deal with anything that, you know, requires me to speak up and speak against. But we did have a couple of our high school students that were in a lab and felt that they were being treated in a way that was inappropriate. And some racist remarks were made to them. And so the first thing I did was I called Tobias because I was so insecure about the fact that I might not handle this properly. And if I don't, I will make matters worse. And I wanted to be fair to all parties, you know, And so Tobias was very, very helpful and told me, you know, advise me and how to go about speaking to the individual and to the students. And so it was handled, in my opinion, when we was all said and done very well. And it made me think a lot about my own shortcomings. You know, as you're talking to somebody else, you don't want to be in the seat of judgment. You want to also think about yourself, When did I marginalize someone else or say something that might have offended them? And I didn't even think it would. You know what I mean? And so it was a good learning experience for me as well.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:21] Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:24] I think this reflexive piece that you have of looking in and really assessing like when was a time that maybe I marginalize someone else is a really key piece to doing some of that personal work that we chatted about earlier. Can you tell us a bit about what it means for you to belong somewhere, either at work in your community or somewhere else? What does it mean when you feel a sense of belonging? How do you show up in that space?

**Speaker 3** [00:20:51] Well, I feel like, you know, there's. I'll give you an example. In my personal life, you know, I like to run, but I don't like to run when it's dark and cold. Right.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:00] Me either.

**Speaker 3** [00:21:01] So the only the only way to do that is to be part of a club or a group of individuals. And we all go out together and we have our, you know, lights on and everything because it's dark. And but that's the only way that I could incentivize myself, you know, is to know that there's a sense of community that we're all doing it together. And then if it's raining and cold or snowy and cold, then we think of ourselves as warriors, you know? So we this sense of like sort of we're, you know, we're going out there and doing something we would never think of doing if we were by ourselves. So that's one just example in terms of my personal life. But I was saying earlier about my involvement with the cancer center and how Dr. Odense has made us feel empowered and part of a team. And so the teams that I worked with in the cancer center are just awesome. It makes me happy to go to work every day and to be a part of something that's, you know, much bigger than myself.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:02] Thank you. So we have one more question from our conversation today and reflecting on anything else that may not have come up. What is one piece of advice, actionable item or takeaway you want to leave our listeners with?

**Speaker 3** [00:22:20] I was thinking about how we're just coming out of this pandemic and there's been so much isolation. I think it's been hard on many different age groups, especially, you know, the elderly and also young people that are high school and college students where, you know, their sense of community was really broken for many years. And so I would just advise young people and elderly, you know, be gentle with yourself and kind to others, because I feel like it's been a hard time for a lot of people. And now it's time to sort of come together.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:00] I love that. I love that. I'm always I've always been a fan of grace. Like giving grace. Extending grace because that's how it comes back to you. You know, you get when you extend it to other people. So, yeah, I want to say thank you, Eileen, for taking part in our podcast.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:17] I wanted to say thank you, too, for being such a lifelong learner, dedicated advocate and strong leader, kind of leading you, Chicago based you and the cancer center in a lot of initiatives. You mentioned pathway programs as well as just prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and justice. We're extending the acronym here.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:38] Yeah. And she's been part of BDC. She's shown up at Pride, you know, and that's really important, showing up, right? I tell people a lot. Sometimes we don't know the answers, but showing up doesn't mean we have to know the answers. It just means we're there. Our bodies are there to show support, to be in solidarity. And so yeah, and I never got to thank you, you know, as a gay person that I just appreciate seeing folks come out to support people in different ways. You know, I think we try to give a lot of opportunity to people to be allies in different ways. And showing up is definitely important.

**Speaker 3** [00:24:15] Oh, thank you. Yeah.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:18] So we appreciate it and we will talk to you next time on the next episode of D&I Diaries. We want to thank our guests today and all our listeners for tuning in to this episode of D&I Diaries. We hope you learned a little bit more about our colleagues and DEI practices at work. Remember to stay in contact with us through our website, our listserv, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to receive updates about new episodes and how to engage with our podcast.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:49] You can find us on all platforms where you listen to podcasts and we drop a new episode the third Tuesday of every month. So join us next time for a conversation with another BSD colleague as they share their DEI journey and truths. Until then, be safe and have a great day.