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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: DR CAROL ANN BENN – SOUTH AFRICAN SURGEON SPECIALISING IN BREAST HEALTH

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us on the line today from Johannesburg, South Africa is Dr. Carol Ann Benn, a renowned surgeon who specialises in breast health. Today Dr. Benn has founded three specialist breast care clinics: Chris Hani Baragwaneth, Helen Joseph and Milpark Hospitals which are dedicated to providing advanced and comprehensive breast treatment to patients in a supportive environment. She has also established the Breast Health Foundation and in addition to operating in theatres, she teaches and consults; working six days a week.
DR. MALKA	Welcome to the show!
DR. BENN	It's great to be here!
DR. MALKA	Dr. Benn as a top breast cancer expert in South Africa, your commitment and dedication to the field has helped many women during their life-changing struggle with cancer, can you please tell us more about the work that you do?
DR. BENN	Well I think the most important thing is you don't stand on titles; I have professorships and everything and you work as a team, so what makes people great is their ability to work together as a team, so I think we must never forget that being impatient or being on the other side of the healthcare....let's call it a passport or border is very hard for everyone and until we get there we don't really realise what it's like and we must always be cognizant of that, so the first thing we need to remember is that it's the person's body not our and it's our job to make sure that they are educated about all the options. I think people are often rushed into treatment and particularly treatment where the doctors says this and therefore you must accept what the doctor says and that is primary one of the focuses I am very anti. Doctor's need to step off pedestals and make sure that it's not a vertical healthcare discussion but a horizontal, and it's not your body it's the patient's body and our job is to educate people so that they are....have the ability to make decisions in often what's a stressful environment. I have one child who's got a chronic illness and I know what it was like sitting in a doctor's room, it was many specialties, degrees, etc., and suddenly it's like wow, you forget everything that you ever knew. So that's the first thing, the second thing is that the power is in the team, so we're quick to turn around and medicine particularly is bad at it where we don't practice multi-disciplinary care so we go I'm the doctor, this is my way and therefore that's the right way to do things. Now multi-disciplinary means that you have people from different specialities around making sure that you have best care for the patient, not best care for the doctor, and that's important so things change all the time in medicine and you can't be up to date with everything so I always say I'm like a master of specifics, but otherwise of none. So I can't cook, can't even find where the stove is, etc., but I know breasts okay and the thing is that I do understand the value that things change all the time and if I meet together with doctors from different disciplines within my field it grows me and in so saying it helps people that

	I treat. I am also fussy about healthcare for all, so I know it's a bit of a socialist approach but it's part of our constitution; people are entitled to good healthcare irrespective of whether they're on a medical aid or not, which means every single patient who has a problem is entitled to good healthcare and medical aids don't insure it so the problem with insurance is it pays out sometimes when you need it and often when you do really need it and I think I heard one of the radio commentators saying it, something that you want when you should have bought....when you didn't need to buy it but you actually really need when you...and you can't buy it when you want it, so that's important and I think when you have to deal with healthcare problems and have to deal with the fact that working your way through the administrative and financial burden around healthcare that's typical for people and our job in medicine is to make sure that we do that safely.
DR. MALKA	So the three key areas that I took out from there was one, that there needs to be less emphasis on a vertical approach...
DR. BENN	....absolutely
DR. MALKA	....and to be more holistic....
DR. BENN	....sure...
DR. MALKA	....provide more holistic care from a patient's perspective; that there is power in the team with a multi-disciplinary approach to healthcare and acknowledging the different specialisations that each representative of the team brings to the table and thirdly, healthcare for all because you're right medical aid is there as an insurance, the trouble is when you're halfway through a procedure you need the entire procedure to go through, not that you've accounted for 50% or 25%.
DR. BENN	You're an excellent interviewer, you've picked up everything that I think is hugely critical, so that for me....it's not about the detail it's about me explaining to you who needs chemo and who needs radiation and personalised oncology which is really the future. We're not very bright in medicine but we're getting brighter and we're less taking the recipe approach of taking the one size fits all and look at the patient, the cancer and working out per patient, what is the right treatment, but I think you've hit the nail on the head it's about working together and I think we're not very good at doing that in medicine and I think I do that well probably because I'm extremely anxious and I hate making mistakes and I'm obsessive compulsive and I really, really want what's ....at the end of the day my patients are like my family, I want to know that they are....when I go to bed at night I sleep. I've done everything in my power to make sure they are properly cared for.
DR. MALKA	I read from one of your previous interviews, I can't recall if it was newspaper or radio or some other broadcast, was that you have helped bring empathy to medicine and you re-iterated that in saying that your patients are like my family.
DR. BENN	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	How....but working in this team environment and having that view as an individual, it needs to be cascaded across the team.....
DR. BENN	....sure....
DR. MALKA	....how did you manage to achieve that?
DR. BENN	So I think I'm very fussy when I teach students and registrars, I try and tell them I might be teaching about breast health and cancer but what I'm really teaching you is the ability to go out and be pioneers and educate communities and be available 'cause otherwise it's like a little check of we've learned how to treat things but we don't let people know and we're quick to turn around and say oh well, we see so much advanced cancer and we see so much advances in the country and the fault is with medicine. Our

	<p>primary job is to make sure we educate communities because you'd be surprised when you let people know about what to look for that the vast majority of people will go hold on, I need to seek care and also we have people turning around and going ....you always have the subjects that put their head in the sand and say no I'm not going to go in and I'm...but if they understand why that's problematic, that the ostrich mentality is just such a bad mentality, then you allow people not to be stressed about the potential for diagnosis which I think is important, so that's awareness, the next thing is access. My big issue is about access particularly into government service and we've got to stop with this people have so much salary, they take a day off work or they don't work and they catch a taxi and they go into a healthcare environment and it's so non-helpful. I'm busy writing an article on holistic hostile medical environments. So you have a problem, you go to a government hospital and someone says oh well there's no clinic today it's a Monday okay you must come back and the poor person goes back and thinks what can I do, I can catch the taxi here in a month's time and that's wrong, we need to have open access, friendly access and awareness so that we improve healthcare because at the end of the day you can save huge amount of costs if people can access the right care at the right time and we educate people about lifestyle and disease.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And from...my points there are from an education point of view, it's so critical because the reality is that our medical professionals are limited from a resourcing point of view both in terms of the numbers of people but also the facilities, but if each individual was informed or equipped with that knowledge of what to look for, then they could seek out the help that they need.</p>
DR. BENN	<p>Absolutely. So the thing is it's not about number of, it's about access to. So I would, I mean we talk about this national health insurance, I can tell you something, if every doctor in private gave half a day into a government facility we wouldn't need anything more, the problem is how do you achieve that and I think we have such....I mean we talk about apartheid, but we have apartheid in healthcare too, we have private and we have government and we need to have more combination between the two where we work together and we see the benefits. My unit at Helen Joseph is spectacular, but it's spectacular because it's such private goodwill that helps the government unit, so I can tell patients you'll get equivalent care to if you were in Milpark, same care, same treatment, same everything and that's what we really need. So it's about a working together and not this concept of one side of the fence, so for me those are things that really need to change. The next thing is we need mentorship. I find in medicine is that there is so little mentorship, everyone is so quick to stand on their only little turf and protect their own little turf that they don't look after people coming after them or people in different environments, so one of the good things I learned from my mentors is your success is marked on the success of the people who come behind you, not on yours, and I think that's important.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And do you think on that note, from a mentorship perspective, that the environment of South Africa is supportive enough towards female doctors?</p>
DR. BENN	<p>Sure. So when I first went into surgery I was one female registrar, there were no other female registrars in the entire department and the first time I went on a call I got told by the then senior registrar he's prepared to date me but not to teach me. Now I have pushed and pushed and pushed so that at almost 50% of our department is female, but that's not good enough, I can sit in a management meeting and people will go oh well you know what there are....we've got three girls that are pregnant this year and I look and</p>

	like go well excuse me where's the problem in that? Now it may have been in my generation I went back to work when my kids were two years old and I took them to work with me and I expressed milk into ice-cubes but the fact of the matter is we need to be....it's a changing world, I'm a technomoron, but we need to realise it's a changing world in terms of technology; in terms of women at work and I do think there's never enough mentorship. If you think you have enough mentorship, look again, because the future lies in the people who come after us.
DR. MALKA	But with that point and I'm hearing you, coming back to work after taking two weeks of maternity leave....
DR. BENN	....yeah.....
DR. MALKA	...well I still think that when you're in that space of either having the opportunity to do so and those are your choices, but it reminds me of Marissa Meyer who's the CEO of Yahoo, who undertook tremendous flak because she took two weeks maternity leave and she went into the position being pregnant and it was almost as if pregnancy was regarded as a disease, when you have Steve Jobs also in IT who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, terminal illness.
DR. BENN	That is it exactly, .....choice of treatment okay, so the thing is I think that's what we have to change. What I see in the women who are extremely successful and it depends how you gauge success, is that we push ourselves to the limit because we think we need to work twice as hard as our male counterparts so that we can stand there proudly and go oh it's okay we can stand on our own and when people don't, so and I often....and I've got a 16 year old daughter and two boys; 25 and 13 and they're quick to tell me I mean I had a lovely family lunch today and my...I think my family are my most grounding influence because they are quite straight and harsh with me in terms of all aspects of life and they'll turn around and say things like you can be tougher on Tier than you are on the boys and I can say absolutely because I think the world is tougher and we need to change that concept, that apologetic concept of well we are women so ummmmm we've got to work twice as hard, you know, you can't cry on the job, you can't have a little moment, we need to be tough and I am probably considered quite tough but I can tell you I do have my moments and probably in private and maybe that's where I'm wrong and maybe where we're all wrong in that we need to say that what's the difference? Why are we working so hard. I will say I'm not a feminist I'm an equalist and my kids say I'm a feminatzi so you can take it as you like but for me it's the concept of having equal opportunity and I think we work so hard as women to be twice the people we need to be to be seen as equal.
DR. MALKA	But in that dynamic and I recall a conversation with someone else and she said it's not about....we will never be the same, we're different but it is about striving to have equal opportunities that we can as both genders, realise.
DR. BENN	Ja.
DR. MALKA	As a gender based programme we consistently focus on the importance of building female leadership because it's important for the future of women, not just in South Africa but also across the globe, as a female doctor who's achieved so much in her life, how do you see female leadership in South Africa, whether it's in the medical profession, political, business; whichever stream?
DR. BENN	Not good enough and I think the thing is and I learn from it every day is there's no-one I won't take on if you want mentorship come to me anytime, male or...young man or young female, and of course I'm more pushing towards female and pushing them further but I think there's always room for improvement and as soon as we look at it with a complacency that it's

	<p>okay, I think that's where the fault lies. So I think we have a huge lack of mentorship not at school between the children between the age of 18 and 28, you leave school and you have that pressure to do something, so am I...am I .....absolutely, do I think that everyone should go to university, absolutely not, do I think that if you pass matric you should have access to tertiary education be it technikon, be it whatever, absolutely but do I think you need mentorship because I think it's such a....a now what? It's kind of like stepping off that cliff. What am I doing now, and I think there's such a lack of...and it doesn't have to be female leaders, it has to be anyone who's in a position of anything as a woman, what are you doing to mentor these youngsters to find their space in society; what are you doing to ensure that they can understand the fact that you can be feminine, you can wear a dress, you can put make up on, you can look beautiful and still be successful. What are you doing for the young girls who fall pregnant at school? What are you doing about HPV vaccination? What are you doing around ensuring that these youngsters have a place? My biggest issue when I was at Bara I tried very, very hard to set up...all my kids grew up at Bara....some form of crèche facility. What is the facility that we are doing so that women can should if they choose, go back to work at two weeks but still breastfeed their kids at six months or three years like I fed mine, what are we doing? If we're not doing and we're waiting around for someone else to do, we're at fault.</p>
DR. MALKA	And did you manage to succeed in setting up anything like that?
DR. BENN	Ja I did, unfortunately that crèche has been shut down but I am an ardent supporter of the nursery school crèche at the Helen Joseph, I do all their Christmas presents every year and that runs beautifully and successfully, but I think that's it. If you think you've got it right you're complacent, there's always room for improvement in any field.
DR. MALKA	I think mentorship's incredibly important and in effect it's almost....well it is it's the responsibility of the current generation to the next generation.
DR. BENN	Absolutely, absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Dr. Carol Ann Benn, renowned surgeon and breast health specialist.
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DR. MALKA	You are listening to 'Womanity – Women in Unity' on Channel Africa, the voice of the African Renaissance, on frequency 9625 KHz, on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV, Channel 802.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Dr. Carol Ann Benn who is a renowned surgeon and breast healthcare specialist. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter@WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	In the previous segment of the conversation we spoke about the components within the medical health environment from a need to provide more holistic treatments for patients, to really put the patients at the centre of everything, the emphasis of multi-disciplinary care and the need for healthcare for all. We also spoke about being able to educate citizens more in terms of what they should be looking out for to provide greater access to facilities for them and in terms of development of young women in particular, aiming for great mentorship so that we can give them the rite of passage and let them walk the lessons that others have learned.
DR. BENN	....or failed.....
DR. MALKA	...well hopefully not to do the failure part but at least not fail where they've dropped off.
DR. BENN	I think the thing is you know when it comes to failure, we're all going to fail at something and for me there're really two types of people who turn

	<p>around and go ho it's everyone else's fault or you turn around and go you know what that's where I can do it better and life is about uphill's and downhill's and we're all going to get things wrong and it's how you self-learn and if you self-learn and realise that hey I can do this better, then you teach better because no-one's perfect, no-one gets it all right and I think that's an important part of mentorship.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I have to say I think we learn more from our failures than we do from our successes.</p>
DR. BENN	<p>Sure, absolutely.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Now as part of driving the agenda that education is a key element for progress and development and you've already reiterated that in terms of the need for all students to go on and have some form of tertiary education, I frequently ask our guests to share some of the obstacles that they've encountered whilst building their career to demonstrate to everyone listening that the successes that women like you have achieved today, they weren't received on a silver platter, they required hard work and sacrifice, so if you could please share with us some of the obstacles that you experienced but also how you overcame them?</p>
DR. BENN	<p>Okay so I kinda knew, and that's unusual, so I say to people don't....if you know what you want to do from young that's not normal okay, so I knew from young I wanted to do medicine, I was really good at English, I wrote really well but particularly poor at maths and science and tall, long legged blonde and a bit of a .....did my work but .....and my mom used to say you're wasting your time and you should go into journalism, you'll never manage anything in medicine; I had no-one in medicine in my family and basically I worked really, really hard to get my marks in matric so I sit here as a professor and I say that you don't need to be good at maths and science to be a professor in medicine so the thing is you must know what you want to do and you must go after it with single minded dedication and hard work. Nothing replaces hard work and you need to be stubborn enough to push, you must also listen though, so if you've got two left thumbs and you can't operate, you can't operate okay so that was that so then I went into medicine and I did very nicely and I thoroughly enjoyed what I did and it wasn't easy, so then I decided to choose surgery and again being tall, skinny, blonde didn't really go down so well with my male counterparts. I was also was a particularly strong non-rotator in the pre-democratic years in this country, put it for another word, and I chose not to rotate through the then seen white hospitals and I did most of my training out of Chris Hani Bara and Alex Clinic and that was also tricky in itself because you then sit as labelled and my partner was a wonderful black doctor, I had a Zimbabwean black doctor and then a wonderful guy from Kenya and we rotated together and that also put me in like a well, you don't fit in and I think that's it, if you know it's right it's right, if it's wrong it's wrong and you don't compromise on right and wrong. Choose your mentors carefully, choose people who are going to be honest with you about your good points and your bad points and you've got to, got to be non-egotistical when it comes to yourself, like I see some of my juniors I train they're quick to point out everyone else's faults but not their faults. Now it might be my anxiety, it might be my inherent nature, but I'm always quick to say here's where I could do it better and I've always done that I've looked and said okay so there has to be fault here, I've got to accept some of the fault, can I do this better, if I can't do it better how can I help crutch my weaknesses and I was fortunate enough to be at the Discovery Leadership Summit where people spoke about the concept of not delegating and if whatever you delegate is not right, but for me delegation is not about</p>

	<p>handing something over and giving it to someone else. I mentioned in my first five minutes the concept of team so you need to know your strengths and weaknesses but you must work together, so people pulling your strength but you help cast out some of your weaknesses and I think that's very, very important. So it hasn't been easy. I know when I was about 36 I was offered a professorship and it was turned down by two seniors in my university to say you're too young, you're too this so I actually turned it down for about 10 years and as I headed up close to 50 I thought well now they all keep on pushing me and I'm saying what are they saying, I'm old now, that professorship is an age issue? But the concept is that it's not about titles, everyone calls me Carol, I stand on no titles it's about working and learning and if you haven't learnt something each day then you need to look at your day.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>I think those are really interesting points and some that I haven't heard previously so thanks for shedding light on them. Working in trauma surgery as a surgeon and medical specialist you're constantly faced with situations which can be life and death and I think that being in that type of environment, it presents life in a completely different perspective, can you tell us how you manage to find balance between doing the work that you do and also the regular things in life?</p>
<p>DR. BENN</p>	<p>Okay so I started in trauma, I set up a couple of heli-services, I then moved to oncology so technically everything I've done in surgery has something to do with death, whether it's cancer or this.....I think the thing is you never find a balance but you've got to find a balance for you so when I talk about me I consider myself completely not balanced but balanced for me, so I am Run Forest Run. I make sure that I do exercise it's good for my brain, it's good for my heart, it's good for my head, that's my....and my psychological soul. I am acutely aware of the small joys in life so I'm sitting here talking to you looking at a little Nemo in a fish tank and I would never have a Nemo in a fish tank because they should be in the sea but this one was bred in a fish tank, so it's about joy. I see joy in the garden outside, I see joy in every single minor aspect of life because if you don't see sunshine in your day everyday you need medication or you need to re-evaluate what you're doing in life. I say to my husband and I say to my kids all the time that people do degrees, long hours and spend hours at work that they don't enjoy, then you need to re-evaluate 'cause it's not about money, you can take nothing with you, it's not about possession it's about enjoyment and fulfilment you must get to each day tired and think I haven't wasted time, you can't take time back; it's a big issue for me. Don't sit and think.....I have consultants who sit in a breast clinic and see seven patients and I'm like the rest of us see a hundred patients and it's like the only time you're wasting is your time, no-one else's, so don't waste time, enjoy every single aspect. I have a fabulous life I have nothing to complain about. I think I am superbly balanced, anyone who looked at me would say no balance here, she's a nut okay, I mean I think I finished consulting at quarter to eight last night and I started at quarter to six in the morning and I do that six days a week, sometimes seven days a week but I love it and I will not do it when I don't love it, but I've had a great day today where I.....badly, cake and family and extended family and meeting a boyfriend....oh my God, okay it's all mom's do, and very nice young if he happens to listen to this ever, but dealt with all those issues and I think I go back thinking what a day, that's what we must do. I love this country and don't complain about Zuma if you are cheating on any work you are doing in the government sector 'cause cheating is not big or small, it's a right or wrong.</p>

DR. MALKA	What you're really saying is that there is no mould and....
DR. BENN	...no....
DR. MALKA	...I think in life people try to aspire to....they define certain things in their life that they want to accomplish; they want to achieve and fit and tick the box and you're very comfortable in not ticking the stereotypical box.....
DR. BENN	....no, no....
DR. MALKA	....or conforming to someone else's standards.
DR. BENN	No, it's not the destination it's the journey. You may never reach the destination so enjoy the journey.
DR. MALKA	That's a beautiful perspective. Now throughout the different programmes that we've had we....I've asked our guests who've made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise is about some of the factors that have contributed to their success. Some speak about hard work others talk about perseverance, in your opinion what have been some of your key drivers?
DR. BENN	I think you must have a humbling look at you, I really do. I think the thing that makes people successful is understanding themselves. I look at all these self-help books and this and that, I don't read any of them but I think what makes people successful is their ability to look at themselves. No-one's perfect, look at you and instead of turning around and going oh well I'm working very hard, I've got huge determination, I am extremely bright, I'm out the box, I'm a sociopath, I'm a this or that, they look at themselves and they go hold on a minute this is what I can do well and this is what I can't do well and this is what I can fix and this is what I can't fix and I think we need a healthy look, not at being egotistical about we're the best and standing in front of the mirror, mirror on the wall who's the fairest of us all, but in terms of just turning around and going I think each single person on this planet and I love, love, love this country, has the ability for greatness within their own..... So look at what you do well, I don't believe in....I tell you what's one thing I'm very fussy about is there's no problem that can't be solved. If the problem can't be solved you're looking at it from the wrong angle, no question about it....
DR. MALKA	...true there are solutions to everything....
DR. BENN	....there is always a solution to something and we must stop trying to get everyone else to find a solution, so you know what, people always talk about if you win the lotto and if you do this, I like don't do any of that but I talk about what are things that I'd like to do. I drive the road and go we need a litter samurai squad. I came back from Japan, I gave a talk there and I saw people when I was doing my little run in the morning and I run like a little old geriatric, people crossing the road to pick up litter and I think in this country we have such a litter problem but no-one picks it up, why, because I didn't drop it, I don't litter.
DR. MALKA	It's somebody else's problem.
DR. BENN	Yeah, but you know what if we all picked up everyone else's litter there'd be no litter that would change the concept.
DR. MALKA	And there'd be, there probably wouldn't be any litter because if people realise they're picking it up they probably wouldn't drop it in the first place....
DR. BENN	...sure, so why don't we do that....
DR. MALKA	....so it's all good citizenship.
DR. BENN	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	And whilst we're reflecting back in terms of components that have driven you and your success what would you say has left its biggest mark on you and made you the person you are today?

DR. BENN	Failure. Things like where I didn't get it right. So about two years ago I applied for a HOD job at Helen Joseph Hospital, Head Of Surgery. I had just come back from the US where I had been offered the top job at the biggest oncology unit in the world and they offered me the job at a salary that my eldest child went how can you not take this for us 'cause it's like winning the lotto and I said no 'cause I actually told him over the counter I said to offer me a job like this to me is tantamount to bribery and corruption 'cause I come from South Africa and we don't even see money like this and then I applied for the HOD job and I got kicked on the curb, we want someone better, someone brighter, someone....whoever, anything but not me and I thought oh my God okay, and then I had a long think and I thought you know what maybe I'm not the right person to run a general surgical unit, maybe I must stick to doing what I'm doing, women's health, breast health etc., but the learn aspect, if you're not learning every day you are not doing and that for me is important.
DR. MALKA	That's a special element, learning every day.
DR. BENN	You've got to.
DR. MALKA	We are unfortunately running out of time, can I please ask you in closing our conversation today to share a few words of wisdom, inspiration or advice which you'd like to pass on to women listening to us today?
DR. BENN	Write your dream down. Write it down and stick it somewhere. On the mirror when you get up in the morning and when you get up every day and know that it is in your capability through yourself and through mentors and don't be shy to ask, don't be shy to drop up an email.... listen to me on the radio and say I think you can help me okay, and help is not money, time....money....it can be education, time, etc., it can be anything but don't be shy to ask. Write it down because it is within your reach to achieve that.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for those important words and for sharing your passion of life, of mentorship, of being able to give back and help people realise their dreams.
DR. BEN	And anyone can call me. Anyone can listen.
DR.MALKA	Thank you very much.
	PROGRAMME END