

# Inclusion debt

Ashish Rishi — founder and CEO of Unwritten Health — on the term he coined for what clinical research owes the people it leaves out, the diagnosis that started it all, and why he'd rather be honest than polished.

Ashish Rishi was 18 when a consultant gave his father six months to live in a two-minute conversation, handed him a flyer, and moved on. His father lived six years — long enough to see Ashish through most of university, three months short of graduation. Years later, writing a publication strategy for a phase three prostate cancer trial, Ashish realised the lead investigator was his father's own consultant. His father had never been told the trial existed. Nothing in the inclusion criteria would have stopped it. That gap became the rest of his career.

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**Inclusion debt just compounds as the cycle goes on.**

— Ashish Rishi, on Pharma Prescribed

## Inclusion debt, defined

Ashish's term for what happens when patient voice is skipped at every stage rather than one. It starts in early discovery, where unmet need gets defined by a focus group of eight to ten patient experts underpinning programmes worth billions. It compounds through protocol amendments, through recruitment budgets thrown at social platforms that skew toward people already willing to share data online, and by market access, where the value dossier tells one population's story. By then, he argues, it's too late to correct — the debt has already been spent.

## Data that doesn't talk to itself

Unwritten Health's Equity Engine works community-first: gurdwaras, mosques, temples, African and Caribbean church and ministry networks, built one relationship at a time toward a UK panel now past 6,500 people. He's candid about the trust problem underneath it. The UK Biobank breach, and reports that patients were asked to stay quiet about it, come up unprompted in his community conversations. His answer is to keep showing up as a commercial entity that says so plainly, rather than pretending otherwise.

# AI without the disingenuous design

He tested a prostate cancer recruitment flyer through the platform: a Black man in a polo shirt, smiling on a golf course with his wife. The feedback came back immediately — men living with prostate cancer aren't playing golf, and if they were, they wouldn't be smiling through it. It's the kind of design failure that reads fine in a meeting and fails on contact with the people it's for. He's now working with Lancaster University on models that synthesise patient data without importing bias or hallucinating conclusions, including where the data centres physically sit.

## QUICKFIRE ROUND

**Advice to his younger self:** "Don't be as angry as you are." Anger drove him early on, until it drove him to burn out in his early thirties. Take it slower — it's a long journey, but you'll get there.

**Top qualities for building a team:** Honesty, passion, authenticity.

**Favourite thing outside work:** His Brussels Griffon, Morpheus. "He's probably the love of my life."

**Golden rule, in life and business:** Authenticity. "I'm never that polished guy. I'll be myself and present authentically. It's got me where I am, and that's what I will try and keep."



## Listen to the full episode

Ashish Rishi on Pharma Prescribed — at [pharmaprescribed.com](https://pharmaprescribed.com) and wherever you get your podcasts.

Ashish Rishi is founder and CEO of Unwritten Health, a Manchester-based patient experience data platform. He sits on the scientific advisory board of IHI-READI (REpresentative Clinical Research, ADvancing Inclusivity in Europe) and the equity committee of the US Prader-Willi Syndrome Association.