



Like many, **Cheri Schmit's** path to pharmacy took a familiar route, working at Nessen Pharmacy in Corydon, Iowa, where she grew up.

"The pharmacist (Mark Nessen) in my hometown when I was in high school is 100 percent the reason I am a pharmacist today," she says. "It was such a well-rounded experience, and I remember how valuable he was and how much people trusted and respected him. I remember thinking, 'Wow, if I could be like that someday, that would be great.'"

Today Schmit is director of clinical pharmacy for GRX Holdings, LLC, based in West Des Moines, Iowa. GRX Holdings is a holding company with 22 pharmacies located in central Iowa. The company is owned by Greg Johansen. The West Des Moines headquarters houses general support services, accounting, marketing and operations, the latter area in which Schmit serves.

Schmit, a 1993 University of Iowa pharmacy graduate who has been in her current role since November 2013, primarily provides assistance to the pharmacies under

the GRX umbrella. "I don't really have a typical day," she says. "I enjoy traveling to pharmacies and interacting with patients, but a lot of what I do is done from our home office. With the pandemic I can't travel as much, so we do a lot of Zoom calls."

Much of Schmit's role involves providing education and training to help in areas such as services and compliance. If a pharmacy is looking to expand its medication synchronization program, she can run reports from the central office identifying potential patients in that store's patient records.

The central office handles the administrative aspects of the business, and having numerous pharmacies grouped as a single entity helps simplify things, such as writing a single check to a vendor. Schmit says it helps pharmacists at the stores focus on patient care. "We're really trying to take things off of the pharmacist's plate that are not allowing them to be a pharmacist, so they can spend time being pharmacists and doing direct patient care."

That's the reason Schmit was drawn to pharmacy. "I've always had a passion for patients and providing services to them," she says. "I've always believed that pharmacists were underutilized in their knowledge and their ability to help patients improve their outcomes."

As it has for everyone, COVID-19 has presented challenges. With the flu season approaching, Schmit says she has been getting a lot of

calls about immunizations, and has been working on a pandemic plan for vaccinations.

"We are trying to see how to offer that service in as efficient a manner as possible, keeping both our patients and our staff safe," Schmit says. "We've had to rethink how we do everything."

Schmit serves as a luminary for CPESN® Iowa, and she sees the CPESN model as the path forward for pharmacists to demonstrate their value and be compensated for it.

"In a world with declining reimbursement and DIR fees, I'm confident in saying this is allowing us to stay in business, having that clinical service revenue," Schmit says. "It's long been known that the pharmacist is valuable, but it's kind of been a hodgepodge so far. I think CPESN is a way to get pharmacists across the country to work together toward a collective goal with cohesive programs that could be marketed to national payers."

Schmit says she has been fortunate in her career to be part of strong relationships with other health care providers.

"Once you have had that relationship where you can all be on the same team, and working to help the patient, as a pharmacist it becomes empowering and you think you can make a difference," she says. "I think pharmacy has a huge ability to lower the total cost of care, just by collaborating with patients and physicians."