

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day, Lake Region Health Care's Health and Wellness Show, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life.

I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Doctor Carmen Schnurer. She is one of the new pediatricians at Lake Region Healthcare, and we're here to introduce her to the community and welcome her to the Lake Region Healthcare family. Good morning, Doctor Schnurer.

Dr. Schnurer: Good morning, Katie. Thank you so much for the invitation. I'm so flattered about it. Thank you.

Katie Johnson: Well, we are just really excited to welcome you to the team of pediatricians taking care of our community's children. It's such an important calling, and we're so happy to have you on the team and have this opportunity to let our listeners get to know you a little bit better.

So tell us about your background, your education and your work experience up until coming to Lake Region Healthcare.

Dr. Schnurer: Sure. I'm also very excited about joining this amazing institution. So I was born in the Dominican Republic and then I move into New York City for all of my medical studies, where I had the opportunity to be at Columbia University for research experience for over three years. Then I join Lincoln Hospital, in New York, in the Bronx, where I did my residency program. And then after that, I move into the state of Utah with my family, where I work for We Care Pediatrics as a pediatrician.

Then I purchase a practice where I was there for approximately nine years, practicing as a pediatrician, board-certified. The community was really nice. I had a very good practice there, but eventually, I decided to move to a nicer place and I found this little place in the world called Fergus Falls, and we just decided to try it out, and we're here.

Katie Johnson: Oh, well, we're so glad that you think this is a great part of the world. We have to agree. Tell us a little bit about what made you decide on medicine as a career, to pursue that as a career, and maybe pediatrics as a specialty, in particular.

Dr. Schnurer: Absolutely. Well, as children, when you're a child, you always have role models. So my biggest role model was my mom, my dad, and my pediatrician. So when I was a little girl, I wanted to be a lot like my mom and my dad. My mom was a teacher and my dad was a pharmaceutical representative for a big company, Johnson and Johnson. So I wanted to be a little bit like both of them, so I always say, "I wanted to be a doctor and I wanted to be a teacher."

So then I became both.

Katie Johnson: Yeah.

Dr. Schnurer: And then I always admire my pediatrician. He was an amazing doctor, so I always wanted to be like him. And he was always kind of part of my family, as well. He was the type of family doctors that used to be with us all the time, so I grew up just seeing him.

So I think, you know, that's probably the reasons why I decided to be a doctor and a pediatrician.

Katie Johnson: Well, that's really interesting. Tell us about, as a pediatrician, then, what's really important to you about providing really high-quality, patient-centered care?

Dr. Schnurer: Well, as a pediatrician, basically, you have to be an advocate for children and make sure that their needs are taken care of. And always, of course, negotiating with the parents and making sure the mom feel comfortable.

As a mother, I have been a patient, too, for my children, and I know how uncomfortable it could be when you have somebody imposing you what you don't want for your child. So I think at the end, pediatrician and parents, we both want the same thing. And it's a matter of coming up to that middle ground level, in which parents feel comfortable that this person is doing the right thing for your child.

So that's when we come really handy in trying to negotiate this. It's very important in our practice.

Katie Johnson: And I think that's part of what Lake Region Healthcare really prides itself on, is being able to develop those relationships of trust, and I think that's what you're talking about, is developing that trust with the parents.

How about particular areas of interest for you, professionally? Do you have any certain areas that are of particular interest to you?

Dr. Schnurer: Well, yes. I love pediatrics in general. I love seeing babies and see them grow until they become adults, but I do have a passion for mental health disorders. Since I was a psychotherapist before becoming a doctor, I really love mental health, and I love developmental disorder in children, just because I think it's very important to pick up on those disorders first, before they become mental health issue.

So those are basically the things that I like the most, but I really love everything in pediatrics.

Katie Johnson: Oh, that's great. And when you talk about mental health, what a significant need. And it seems to be a growing need in society today.

Dr. Schnurer: Yes, it is, and it's sad, but at the same time, it make me feel good that I have those qualifications and that I understand very well what's going on. I like to make sure the parents understand the importance of treating those conditions and a lot of time, people tend to be a little skeptical about mental health.

And mental health is probably even more important than physical health, because it leads you to physical problems in the future if you don't treat it on time. Making parents aware of that, and making sure that during the physical exam, when we provide those wellness checkup for children, it's really, really important for pediatricians to assess that.

So my main goal, when I was in my private practice, was always to make sure that I was screening that on time, that I was making sure that we weren't missing that. Very, very often, children know how to hide those problems and it's for us as an adult to try to make sure that we know how to talk to them, how to make them feel comfortable during any interview. A child feel very, very scared whenever they go to the doctor. All that they can think about is needles.

Katie Johnson: Right, right.

Dr. Schnurer: So you want to make sure that they are happy and comfortable when they see you, and not to see you as a threat, other than rather seeing you as a big help. So that's why I think mental health is so important now.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely, and I think that that points to another reason why those annual wellness exams are so important. Your child might seem perfectly physically healthy, but it's also an important time to check in on their mental health.

Dr. Schnurer: Absolutely. I really believe that the wellness exam are actually even more important. I know that probably when your child is sick, we as parents, we all get frustrated and we feel that we have this Mama Bear, kind of.

Katie Johnson: Yes.

Dr. Schnurer: But actually, the wellness exam seems to be even more important, because this is the time that the pediatrician takes to see things that cannot be seen. And I always say to my parents in my practice that the wellness exam is not only about immunizations. And parents tend to think that immunizations is the only reason why they have to come to the wellness exam. So the immunizations can be the icing on the cake, but it's actually not everything.

So I have a lot of parents that they opt not to do immunizations, and I say to them, "You know what? Even if I am pro immunizations, I respect your belief, but I really think that the wellness exam is actually what matters here. So to make sure that your child is healthy in all ways, mental and physical."

Katie Johnson: What great advice. You work alongside some really great pediatric professionals here. You're starting to get to know them. I'm sure you've heard about Doctor Magnuson and the big shoes that he left to fill when he retired, but we have just now a really full and robust staff of Doctor Kaushik, Doctor Folstad, yourself, Amy Fisher. You're joining a great team. We've been talking about how same day appointments are often available for children now, with the pediatricians here, and that's just fantastic.

What are you kind of looking forward to, or why did you choose to join this team at Lake Region Healthcare?

Dr. Schnurer: Well, you know, I'm so flattered to be with them. They are amazing doctors and when I was practicing as a solo pediatrician, I felt very lonely. So I really wanted to have that kind of warmth, the feeling that I have other doctors around me and people that I can count on, that I can discuss when is needed.

When I was in my private practice, it was just my own decisions, and I was the only one.

Katie Johnson: Right, sure.

Dr. Schnurer: So I kind of felt a little lonely, and then when I came for the interview at Lake Region, that was one of the things that make me decide, because seeing other places, you don't feel the physicians are so welcoming, and here, I did notice that from everybody. Everybody's so nice and so willing to help you and to make you feel really comfortable. And I think that's really important.

Katie Johnson: Well, yeah. I can tell you're gonna be a great addition to the team. You're bringing another important expansion to the team, maybe, in that you're fluent in another language. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Dr. Schnurer: Yes, absolutely. Well, my first language is Spanish, since I was born in the Dominican Republic. So I speak fluent Spanish and I speak English, of course. I have to.

Katie Johnson: Of course.

Dr. Schnurer: So I also speak a little bit of French. So the Dominican Republic share the island with Haiti, which the main language is Creole, which is derived from French. So we kind of have a little bit of interaction with the language. It's not that I'm as fluent as I am in Spanish, but I can understand French and speak it as well.

Katie Johnson: What about when you're not working? We haven't talked about that side of you. What do you just enjoy doing when you are not practicing medicine?

Dr. Schnurer: Oh, that's a good question. I love my family.

Katie Johnson: I'm not surprised.

Dr. Schnurer: I really love my family, so I love spending time with them and we love outdoors. We have a big motor home that we take it wherever we want, and we just love the outdoors. And I love cooking, too, but my passion is reading. I can't live without to read.

Katie Johnson: Fantastic. Well, anything else that you'd like to share with our listeners before we wrap up today?

Dr. Schnurer: Well, I'm so happy to be here, and I think Fergus Falls is a wonderful community. Everybody seems to be so nice. Like for example, went to store a couple days ago, and the ladies there, they were all going, "Hello! Are you gonna be the pediatrician?"

And I was so kind of surprised to see the people are really, really nice here, in this community, and they make you feel so welcome, and that's really important for us. We felt that Fergus Falls is an amazing community, and I thank you all for that.

Katie Johnson: Well, I'm so glad that you feel that warm welcome. We are so glad to have you here in our community and on our team of professionals in the Pediatrics Department at Lake Region Healthcare. Doctor Carmen Schnurer my guest today. New pediatrician at Lake Region Healthcare. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Schnurer: Thank you, Katie, for the invitation. That was very nice of you, and I'm so happy to be here.

Katie Johnson: Doctor Carmen Schnurer and Katie Johnson on Apple a Day this morning, reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.