

ROSALIND FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND SCIENCE STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

## Business Member Spotlight: Julie Thiel

by Victoria R. Stang, 2024 PharmD Candidate, Aman Patel, 2025 PharmD Candidate



**J**ulie Thiel, PharmD, is the supervisor for the Children and Youth with Special Health Needs unit within the Division of Public Health at the State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services. She recently transitioned to this role after being a psychiatric pharmacist for the State of Wisconsin, specializing in mental health at Winnebago Mental Health Institute and Wisconsin Resource Center.

Thiel received her Bachelor of Science degree in Pharmacy in 1998 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and later graduated with her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Florida in 2015. Thiel believes that she has taken a non-traditional path throughout her career. She first worked as an intern at Shopko and later moved to California to work at a Walgreens training location. With encouragement to move into administration, she became a pharmacy manager, training pharmacists within the San Francisco district. Thiel transferred to a 24-hour HIV specialty location and learned she had an interest in specialty pharmacy. In the summer of 2002, she returned to Wisconsin and assumed the role of pharmacy manager at Walgreens in Appleton. After several years of working as a pharmacy manager there, she transitioned out of retail pharmacy into a clinical pharmacy role at the Winnebago Mental Health Institute and Wisconsin Resource Center Shared Services Pharmacy. In this role, she served as a staff pharmacist for seven years, followed by seven years as the Pharmacy Director and Lab Supervisor. In her role as a director, Thiel served as vaccine coordinator and also oversaw laboratory operations, where she assisted with laboratory workflows related to COVID-19. In September 2022, Thiel moved to the Division of Public Health for the State of Wisconsin, working as a Health Unit

Supervisor in the Bureau of Community Health Promotion.

When Thiel is not working or spending time with her family, she can be found volunteering. She is an active member of 5-Stones, an organization working on the prevention of sex trafficking in the state of Wisconsin. Thiel learned about this organization at a Lunch and Learn session, and knew she had to get involved due to her interest in health promotion and education. Some of the other organizations for which Thiel volunteers are Feeding America, which provides food to people facing hunger; Pillars, which helps people experiencing homelessness; and Harbor House, a domestic and sexual violence shelter.

### Daily Practice

In her current role, Thiel works within the Family Health Section and oversees three main program areas: the birth defects prevention and surveillance program, facilitation of the newborn screening program, and healthcare access for children and youth with special healthcare needs such as diabetes, asthma, mental health needs, or physical disabilities. Her day-to-day responsibilities include strategic planning and execution, personnel management, and maintaining her program areas as required by state statutes. Thiel is a continuous learner and enjoys taking on new responsibilities in order to effect positive change. One of her focuses is leveraging the strengths of those around her to create a positive work environment.

### Overcoming Obstacles

New roles and responsibilities do not come without challenges; Thiel recognizes that different challenges come up in different ways, but acknowledges that it is normal when working with others. One of the biggest challenges she faces in her new role is learning the process for the

Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, a federal program that works in partnership with state governments to support mothers, children, and families. Understanding the parameters of the block grant has been a valuable opportunity for Thiel to gain a new skill while applying what she learned from her community-based organization volunteer work. Aside from tackling block grant writing, many of Thiel's other challenges have been administrative in nature, such as managing open positions and hiring, onboarding new team members, and learning the operations and organization within a new division. Thiel believes that "transitions are hard and scary, but having an interest and wanting to learn in that area and having that growth mindset will help to get you through." Though Thiel has made many transitions throughout her career, she believes that every opportunity has given her a new skill set that is transferable to the next new role. It can be easy to forget how much learning happens when there are new people to manage and report to with different organizational structures, but she believes each interaction has presented another opportunity to grow. With that in mind, Thiel says she would not change anything in the path of her career. She credits each job with having given her an opportunity to learn, grow, and work with a diverse group of healthcare professionals, proving that the skills you learn along your journey can help you become a well-qualified professional.

All of the transitions that Thiel has made throughout her career were due to what she needed at the time, and everything she has done has been based on a mindset of personal growth. Getting a PharmD was a personal goal for her, and thus she pursued a non-traditional working professional Doctor of Pharmacy program. This opened up the opportunity to become a pharmacy director in a shared service pharmacy that

provided medication for a hospital setting and correctional setting (~600 beds total). Throughout her career, she's understood the importance of influencing the future of pharmacy practice by educating student pharmacists on rotations. In 2016, she was awarded the Larry Boh Clinical Instructor Excellence Award from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy, a huge milestone for her. She implemented a mental health advanced pharmacy practice elective and it was exceptionally validating that her students enjoyed the rotation. Thiel was recently awarded the 2022 PSW Pharmacist of the Year Award at the PSW Annual Meeting last August. To Thiel, having a support system is essential. She says, "when you are first starting out, you may not feel like you have the skills or you are not qualified, but just giving it a go is important."

## Moving Forward

Over the next few years, Thiel sees many opportunities for pharmacists to get involved in specialty practices and pharmacy practice advancements. One of those unique areas is the correctional system; as different provider shortages grow in the system, there is future potential for pharmacists to step up to help manage chronic conditions such as depression, asthma, and diabetes.

She is excited to see administrators become more knowledgeable about the burnout and financial stressors that negatively impact staff. By appropriately encouraging healthy coping skills, completing the stress cycle to prevent holding onto stress, and creating ways for employees to better maintain work-life balance, administrators will be better equipped to support their staff and provide what they need to maintain a healthy work environment. Thiel sees potential for pharmacy practice advancement by focusing on mental health, and specifically how trauma affects long-term health. In ambulatory care and public health settings, pharmacists will be able to connect patients to greater healthcare access and other services related to health promotion rather than treatment. Many areas fall under the umbrella of public health, such as tobacco cessation, immunization, chronic conditions, and substance use disorders—all of which pharmacists are trained in and have the ability to make a significant impact. She believes pharmacists can get into these practices through statewide initiatives and collaborations among different partnerships and organizations. The infrastructure has been set for pharmacists to get involved in these areas; now it is time to take the initiative and get involved to make a difference.

## Words of Advice

To aspiring pharmacists and student pharmacists, Thiel advises, "It is important to form connections broader than just pharmacy and to advocate for yourself when you see interest in something, even if you do not have formal training in that specific area. Communicate that interest to your supervisor, especially when you are first starting out or if you do not really know. Ask questions, ask to participate in committees, and look for opportunities to grow. You can expand your knowledge and skills in an informal setting through volunteering and through other opportunities; it does not always have to be done through your career or even be pharmacy specific." Thiel's words of wisdom are, "When you see an interesting opportunity, jump!"

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**Below-Left:** Dr. Julie Thiel and Jamie VanDyck, Deputy Director of Winnebago Mental Health Institute. **Below-Center:** Julie Thiel with parents David and Nancy Hanson on graduation day at Madison. **Below-Right:** University of Florida PharmD graduation with husband Todd, daughter Elsa, and son Hunter

