

Emergency responder

TERRI SCHMIDT, R.N., M.D. '85 R '88
ESTHER POHL LOVEJOY LEADERSHIP AWARD

Don't let the "fairy grandmother" glitter on Dr. Terri Schmidt's iPhone case fool you. Yes, fairy grandmother is an indispensable role for her these days – her four grandchildren live within walking distance of her Portland home.

But Dr. Schmidt's life has almost always been about rough-and-tumble action – along with the fairy glitter – as an emergency department nurse, then doctor and disaster medical worker. She's spent a career looking for chaos and working to fix it quickly.

"To be perfectly honest, I'm an adrenaline junkie," Dr. Schmidt said.

She's semi-retired now after working at OHSU for more than three decades, including as interim chair of the school's Department of Emergency Medicine. But she still responds to disasters as a chief medical officer of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Incident Response Coordination Team.

In August, she deployed to Hurricane Harvey in Texas, followed by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. She was part of the command team that rode out the latter in the hallway of a hotel and woke to a "pre-industrial world," she reported. "There was no power, no Internet, no cell phones. The roads were impassable; ports and the airport were closed."

But with her team, she figured out what they could do to start making things better. Just as she's done throughout her career.

It's not always been about chaos, of course. Drawn to patients approaching end of life, Dr. Schmidt early on became a leader at OHSU in the movement to ensure the health care industry listened to what patients with advanced and progressive illnesses wanted for end-of-life care. Oregon and OHSU's leadership on the issue led to the creation of Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment. Dr. Schmidt became the first director of the electronic POLST registry, allowing immediate access to patients' preferences.

For herself, Dr. Schmidt said she'd rather "go out with a bang than a whimper." But the purpose of POLST "is not to say this is the right answer, this is the wrong answer, but to honor whatever your preferences are." **E**

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