

What happened to doc?

By CHARLES M. GODFREY
The question, "Where is My Doctor?" (Fitzhenry & Whitehead; 237 pages; \$12.50) which is put by author L. DeWitt Wilcox, is one that could equally well be put by patients, wives or legislators today.

Wilcox, a distinguished physician-internist of London, Ont., is asking plaintively whatever has happened to the good old doc who made house calls, diagnosed rare diseases with the aid of only a stethoscope, and was a paragon of virtue and puritanical self dedication.

The author goes to great trouble to explain the disappearance of this species. The blame is laid at the door of too much education (particularly research) too much dependence on laboratory work, too many fancy sub-specialties which cut up the body medical, and too many women in the profession.

Wilcox points out that as long as North American universities allow students to take electives rather than mandatory core courses (such as anatomy) we'll do nothing but allow lazy students to just grow lazier. Electives permit the student to choose his own course.

This, Wilcox states, encourages the student to avoid the major clinical areas which are so necessary to the development of a "good" doctor. His definition of a good doctor is one who can make all the organs work in the harmony of good physical and mental health.

And to the author's mind the only person who can do that is the physician-internist — that is, someone who has taken four post-graduate years in order to qualify as a specialist in internal medicine.

This isn't the general practitioner — he can only do a quarter of the work of the physician-internist.

Nor is the new-style doctor who is a specialist in "family medicine." This sub-specialty, according to Wilcox, ties the doctor to a social unit — the family — that may not exist.

FLESH ABHORRERS
But the sub-specialties aren't the only group responsible for the present state of medicine (doubt not that Wilcox thinks medicine is in desperate straits).

Look at psychiatrists: "They seem to abhor the flesh" and are not genuinely interested in organic disease. Most of today's psychiatrists should have taken a degree in psychology, which carries no responsibility for the care of the sick patient.

To set your mind at ease so that you can begin to answer the question posed in his book title, Dr. Wilcox lists the various types of doctors — starting with the surgeons and the surgical sub-specialists (that includes all of those who take care of the eye, ear, nose, throat, brain, nerves, gynaecology, plastic surgery, orthopaedic, urology, etc.).

After listing the sub-specialties, in order to put his arguments in its perspective, Dr. Wilcox sets down a list of 22 common but important complaints that the doctor is called on to treat — and then cites the most common errors made in performing the act.

According to him, doctors don't do too well. They miss the difference between shingles and gall bladder — all you have to do is take the time to do a white blood count and wait three or four days. Some specialists don't.

Others don't realize a woman with chills and fevers could have thyroid disease. It's easy to diagnose by a simple sedimentation rate test.

But one of the greatest drains on medicine, he argues is the female doctor. According to the author, women aren't strong enough, they have an average working life barely one-third of that of a man, and they comprise less than one per cent of the best clinical teachers in medicine, surgery and obstetrics.

His remedy for the shortage of doctors: Limit female enrollment to five per cent of the medical class.

The book is well written, entirely without intentional humor, full of epigrams and anecdotes to show the interesting fabric of medicine over the past hundred years.

Its case histories, presented to illuminate specific points, seem to be drawn from a cabinet of medical curiosities rather than from real world or common-sense medical practice.

But in spite of the inadequacies, Dr. Wilcox is trying to make a statement that affects physicians, legislators and patients. There are many concerns in the current delivery of medical care. The problem must be addressed.

Where is my doctor? It's a good question. Unfortunately it is rhetorical in this book.

Dr. Godfrey, a former member of the Ontario Legislature is a specialist in physical medicine.

— Thomson News Service.

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