

Family Medic's Image Altered

By W.W. EDGAR

Of all the professions, none has undergone more change in the past 20 years than the old-time family doctor. There was a time, well within the memory of middle-aged citizens, when the family doctor would leave his home in the dead of night and battle his way to a patient in his upstairs bedroom to help relieve the pain and suffering.

Those days are now gone. In their place has come the tendency to rush a sick or injured person to the hospital at the slightest provocation. "We have undergone a quiet revolution," says Dr. O.L. Brooker, one of Livonia's pioneers who once made 26 house calls in a day during a heavy snowstorm.

"There was a time," he recalls, "when people went to the doctor only when they thought they may be suffering from something fatal. A large percentage of the people only saw a physician when they were children and then did not see him again until they reached middle age."

Seated in the quiet of his office the other afternoon, Dr. Brooker recalled the days when people took such things as colds, bruises, bumps, headaches, rheumatism and bellyaches for granted.

"They assumed it was good for children to have all the childhood diseases — chicken pox, scarletina, measles and get it over with early in life. In fact, some parents deliberately exposed their children to get it over with during their childhood."

What brought about the great change?

The good doctor was quick to credit the press — both newspapers and magazines — for the revolution.

He cited the case of medical columns in the newspapers that have grown in popularity and recalled that his friend who took writing a medical column and had his works appear in 237 daily papers.

He gave due credit to magazines and then called attention to the modern television where such programs as "Marcus Welby," "Young Doctor Malone," "The Bold Ones," "The Interns" and "Medical Center" bring health care right into your living room.

"Aside from this," he said, "the pediatricians and general practitioners have done a great job of educating the public to bring their children in for a check-up every six months. Now the people expect more from their physicians — and they're getting it."

As a society, according to Dr. Brooker, we are moving away from the prudery of the Victorian period. Such books as "The Naked Ape" by Desmond Morris, and his more recent book, "The Human Zoo," all have emphasized that man is an animal, a mammal to be exact.

"This leads to a more earthy approach to such things as venereal disease, the body beautiful and permissive nudity. "This, in turn, leads to all sorts of different directions," says the doctor.

"For instance, there are special deodorants for vaginal cleanliness for women. And only recently I saw an ad for a special kind of 'wet toilet' tissues for cleansing the rectal area."

"All of these ads use medical language in general and science publications that would have been utterly impossible in the early '50s."

The Declaration of Independence, he said, speaks of the "right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

"You must now add to these 'inalienable' rights, the right to health care. Such things as Medicare and Medicaid have developed only within the last 20 years on both the state and national level. And we still lag behind Sweden, Norway and England — and even Russia."

We have seen the beginning of people exercising this "right to health care," but we haven't seen the end, according to the doctor.

He cited recent legislation on the national level, enabling the government to pick up the check for individuals suffering from kidney diseases as an opening step.

"We can predict with some sureness," he said, "that similar pieces of legislation will eventually cover other diseases, such as Parkinson's and musculosclerosis, and will lead to national health insurance."

"It is not a question of 'if' it comes but rather only 'when' and to what degree."

All of the foregoing are really by-products of the scientific advances that have been made in health care in the past few decades.

"Remember when the use of sulfa came in?" the doctor asked. "And remember how it turned patients blue? This was simply because it was a drug that originally was a dye. Of course, they found the coloring element and removed it, and people no longer turned blue."

After sulfa came penicillin, once so scarce that it was specifically reserved for the most serious cases.

All of this was due to the work of biochemists and molecular scientists and the cell



DR. O.L. BROOKER

biologists who have done wonders.

They have developed dozens of antibiotics and many differing combinations of sulfa. This was done, according to Dr. Brooker, by manipulating the molecules and creating new chemical formulas.

In industry, the same technique has given us cellophane, nylon, and dacron.

In medicine it has made possible the antibiotics, the sulfa and the host of new

drugs just beginning to enter the market.

Leaning back in his chair Dr. Brooker related that many persons believe the younger generation has learned to regard pills as a way of life. They see their parents take pills to induce sleep — to keep themselves awake — give them vitamins — and give themselves a lift.

And now, in many cases, the use of pills is giving way to alcohol. Much of this would be eliminated according to the doctor by watching one's diet.

Returning to the great changes in the profession, the doctor emphasized the discovery of new techniques. Tetanus, the dreaded illness, can be licked, he said by placing patients in special rooms and maintaining an unusual high percentage of oxygen in the air.

He further emphasized that polio is no longer to be feared and that real progress is being made on some forms of cancer. Tuberculosis has been licked and in time can be cured.

Dr. Brooker also cited the great work being done in the hospitals with their medical technicians, the knowledgeable physicians on their staffs and the hospital administrators.

"They have done a great job in the intensive care units. There was a time when the first heart attack was almost always fatal, and death was regarded as inevitable. Now only one in 10 dies from the first attack."

"We have learned that we have two minutes to get blood flowing again through the brain to prevent brain damage. This can be done by resuscitation procedures and the use of a defibrillator."

"The individual must be responsible for the rest of health care. No physician can give a person 'life' and nothing, once a person is dead, can return him to 'life' in this world. Life is a precious gift to be guarded, to be watched and to be maintained by the individual to the end that his pursuit of 'life and liberty' do lead, indeed, to happiness."

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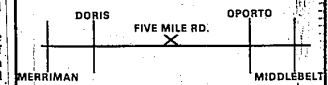
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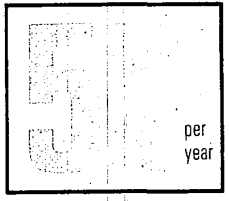
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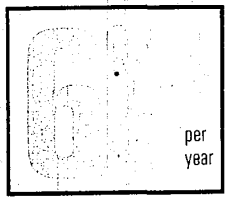
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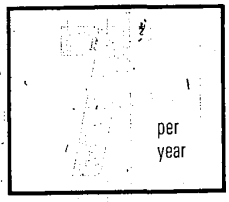
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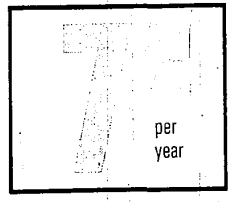
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