

House calls

After 44 years downtown, Dr. Schroeder puts down his stethoscope

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASCH
SPECIAL WRITER

During 44 years in downtown Farmington, Dr. Raymond F. Schroeder has treated thousands of patients, delivered some 450 babies and nurtured countless friendships with patients, whose fate he considered his responsibility. "When someone dies, it's extremely sad, of course," Schroeder said. "But a doctor should see a death as a defeat to some degree."

Retired only as of Monday, he seems to be taking with him a finding tradition of doctors who looked after a family's entire medical needs and became an important member of the unit.

A couple of days before his retirement, the tall, thin, Cary Grant look-alike, with steely blue eyes, sat at his worn office desk and was reflective.

"I didn't think it would bother me, but it has," said Schroeder, 69. "There's an awful lot of people I won't see for a long time. The fact that people come to you is a flattering thing. It's extremely and because I miss some of the most marvelous people in the world who have been coming to me for years."

With about 200 retirement cards tucked away, Schroeder looked back at the upstart doctor he was four decades ago when he was recently married to his wife of 45 years, Joan Marie.

He is amazed by how new technology and medical advances have extended the average life span by 10 years, and how the plethora of information available to beginners today makes his generation pale in comparison.

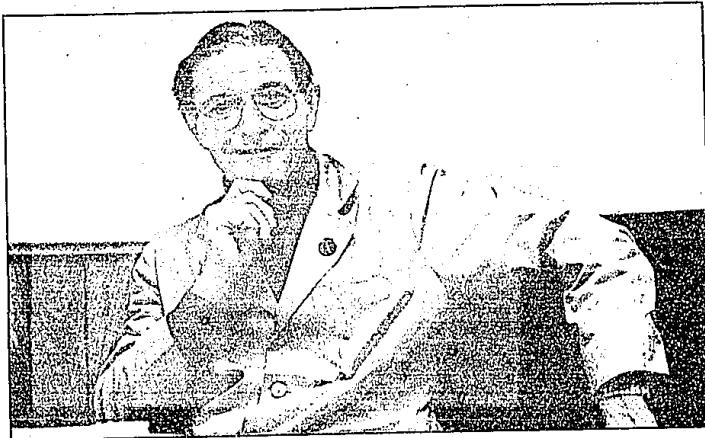
Changing world

"By today's standards, we were inept," he said. "These doctors are very, very bright and well-trained. When I just started out, cholesterol levels were considered acceptable at 300 and now it's a death knell. In those days, it was truly a practice, because we didn't have the technology."

Schroeder was 25 when he graduated from Kirksville Osteopathic School of Medicine in Kirksville, Mo., after four years at Central Michigan University.

He chose osteopathic medicine, because he liked the philosophy. "Osteopathic medicine tends to encompass the whole body rather than individual parts."

He advises new doctors to listen to their patients. "If you listen to your patients long enough, the patient will tell you what's wrong. I



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BASSLER

House calls: After 44 years in Farmington Dr. Raymond Schroeder has retired after seeing thousands of patients and helping bring more than 400 babies into the world.

was told that as a young doctor and I'm convinced that's accurate. Too many doctors take their patients for granted. And if they do the best job that they can, the financial rewards will take care of themselves."

In a profession where everything is life and death, Schroeder's career score pad is marked with low points when his patients died, in spite of the inevitability, and delivering babies among the happiest times, including those done on trailer home floors. In fact, he delivered babies to babies he delivered.

Marking the advancements in technology, Schroeder explained that early in his practice there were no ultrasounds for pregnant women and multiple births were often a surprise.

"One time during a delivery, a woman had twins," he said. "I wasn't prepared, the patient wasn't prepared and the family wasn't prepared. But everyone was happy."

Over the years, he had two offices on Grand River, 34 years in the last one and 10 years across the street. Early on, he regularly put in 13-hour-days and his work week included Saturday. More recently, he cut down to 24 hours and he added, "that was much more pleasant." He has three children and two grandchildren.

"In the beginning, when our children were small, there were a lot of hours that he put in, but it all worked out," his wife said from their West Bloomfield Township home.

Different practice

As his patients aged, Schroeder stopped delivering babies and treating youngsters and began concentrating on the needs of people 55 and older. At 95, his oldest patient is Kathleen Rich, a 25-year patient.

Years ago, when Farmington was a small community, it was common for police officers to drop off people with minor medical needs at his office, which served as an emergency room of sorts. He wore a coroner's hat, too. Police would summon him to death scenes and Schroeder had to figure out the cause.

With the tremendous amount of information and constant medical breakthroughs, Schroeder said it would be impossible for one doctor to take care of family's entire medical needs from pregnant women, their deliveries, the children who were born and their grandparents.

For all of his 44 years, Schroeder's best resource for staying informed about new procedures was daily visits to the hospitals visiting his patients and talking to their specialists. And rather than taking an adversarial approach suits that plague doctors, Schroeder looks at it from the patient's perspective.

"Malpractice insurance has been a major concern and affects some of the way a doctor practices. But it has some purpose because without it the patient would lack protection."

Similarly, the city of his practice has changed tremendously, too.

When Schroeder first hung his shingle, he was the sixth doctor in the community. Today, he's one of hundreds. The avid golfer is also nurturing a love of gardening and plans to spend more time vacationing, something he couldn't do at length before. In the past, as an independent practitioner, he couldn't leave his patients for more than 10 days at a time.

Amid all the changes in the medical field and the community, one thing remained constant. Schroeder continued to make house calls until the end.

"If you listen to your patients long enough, the patient will tell you what's wrong. I was told that as a young doctor and I'm convinced that's accurate. Too many doctors take their patients for granted. And if they do the best job that they can, the financial rewards will take care of themselves."

Dr. Raymond Schroeder
—Farmington physician

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