

Book Review

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House Calls: Recollections of a Family Physician

by Thomas L. Stern, M.D. BookPartners, Inc., Newberg, Ore., 2001, 417 pages, \$17.95.

House Calls is the autobiography of one of the more famous founders of the specialty of family medicine, Dr. Thomas Stern. Dr. Stern's distinguished career included service as the residency director at one of the first family practice residencies in California. He was also the vice president for education and scientific affairs for the American Academy of Family Physicians. He became something of a celebrity, however, as a result of his role as the medical consultant for the *Marcus Welby, M.D.* television series.

The book chronicles Stern's life—from the orphanage, to the military, to medical school, and then into practice. Much of the book is focused on his practice in rural Sherwood, Oregon. The story describes his beginnings in a private practice and reveals openly his self-doubt and worry as a young "country doctor." As a "Generation One" family doctor, Stern had no formal postgraduate training in primary care, because family medicine had not yet been invented as a medical specialty. His teachers were, in the truest sense, his patients.

It becomes clear as one reads the book that Dr. Stern cared deeply for his patients and what happened to them. He was not afraid to share with patients his true thoughts and feelings. For example, he tells a story of a patient who was an alcoholic in an abusive relationship. Stern recognized her reliance on alcohol and an abusive husband as a symptom of her low self-image. He used his therapeutic relationship with the patient to help her get past the denial she was in and see that she could have a better life.

One is also struck with a sense of the sacrifice that Stern and his family undertook so that he could provide care for his patients at all hours of the day and night. Many times, patients would come to the back door of his home in need of stitches or an injection. His wife convinced him to construct an examination area on the back porch when she tired of his examining patients on the kitchen table.

Overall, *House Calls* is a very moving story of a family doctor and his interactions with patients. Stern's life demonstrates commitment to the biopsychosocial model for continuous and comprehensive care for the entire family that is the hallmark of family practice. More broadly, his therapeutic approach serves as a worthy model for any primary care physician wishing to fully appreciate the psychosociospiritual needs of his or her patients.

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