A physician with community practice background will find this journal stimulates recall of the early years of establishing practice, home, and family. Some who felt isolation and frustration in those years might find reassurance that their experiences were not unique. Anyone who seeks to understand the practice of medicine in community would benefit from reading this work, as would those considering such a career. This book should be read by persons responsible for planning, shaping, financing, or regulating community health care systems and organizations, for in doing so, they would develop an intimate understanding of the workings of such systems and the very personal needs they try to meet. Such an understanding cannot be found in the collection of diagnostic classifications, lists of symptoms, reports of encounters and procedures, and similar tabulations used to describe or evaluate a medical practice.

Dr. Loxterkamp reveals his life to be one of intensity, commitment, and searching. He also shares his contentments and satisfactions. One might wish him more sheer joy and happiness than what seems to come through in the narrative. But, he says of himself (page 136): "There is always a tension between enjoying life and examining it."  

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Have you wondered what it would be like to practice medicine from 1948 to 1988 among the Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania? This fascinating period in medicine spanned the early years of antibiotics, the scourges of polio and rheumatic fever, the shift from solo to group practice, and the changes in health care financing from the $2 fee-for-service office visit to medical insurance to managed care.

Dr. Wentz chronicles these events, covering four decades, through 39 short vignettes. He writes in a matter-of-fact, straightforward, conversational style that is most likely consistent with the way in which he practiced and cared for his patients. As he relates the satisfactions and frustrations of his practice, he intersperses reflections on lessons he learned, such as the value of nurses, the power of suggestion, the courage of patients facing adversity, and the importance of a supportive family and community for both patient and physician. Perhaps his most interesting insights evolve from experiences with his Amish patients that illustrate how their beliefs sustained them as they dealt with the challenges of life and death. He also describes the difficulties of getting the Amish to accept such preventive measures as prenatal care, well-baby examinations, and immunizations.

Throughout these episodes Dr. Wentz conveys acceptance of his patients, himself, and his times without undue moral judgment or philosophical speculation. Nevertheless, the reader becomes aware of the unique problems associated with practicing alone out of an office in one's home, the stresses on marriage and children, the interruptions of family gatherings by patients with emergencies, and the concerns of losing patients to a competing physician in the community.

Most of these stories are not particularly dramatic. Their impact arises from the cumulative descriptions of a type of practice that will not be repeated. A physician who appeared to possess the qualities necessary to succeed during a unique time in medical history within a geographical location enriched by people with distinctive motivations and moral principles. Thus, this book might be of interest to those physicians who would like to know more about this way of life, to people living in the vicinity of Lancaster County, and to lay persons who wonder about the daily activities of a busy general practitioner.

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