

What Matters in Medicine: Lessons from a Life in Primary Care

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What Matters in Medicine: Lessons from a Life in Primary Care is the story of general practice in America. The focus of Dr. Loxterkamp's inquiry is the essence of the doctor's art— what was once selflessly shared; what is urgently needed again. The topic could not be more timely. The unfolding of the Affordable Care Act, the sponsoring of Patient-Centered Medical Homes, the emergence of Accountable Care Organizations, and the disappearance of private practice are all reshaping the structure of primary care and its ability to balance health care needs of an aging population with a compassionate awareness of costs and value.

David Loxterkamp grew up in rural Iowa. His mother was a nurse, his father a solo general practitioner who died when David was thirteen. He witnessed first-hand the rewards and sacrifices that bear upon medical lives in a tightly-knit community. Dr. Loxterkamp brought that knowledge and temperament to the midcoast of Maine, where he has practiced and lived for the last 28 years with his wife, Lindsay, and their children. He was trained, like his father, to deliver babies, attend hospitalized patients, perform minor surgery, visit nursing homes, and call on the homebound. Over the years, he saw medicine change, his patients change, and firm beliefs begin to bend. Yet change comes hard, not just for the neediest of patients but for their doctor, too.

What Dr. Loxterkamp continues to discover and affirm is the essence of primary care— that what patients need first and foremost is a measure of conversation, friendship, and hope. And this they need with each visit to the doctor, no matter their presenting complaint or complexity of care. Medicine remains far more the “business” of human relationships, wherein lies the call and courage for real change, than it does the machinery of procedures, metrics, and optimized reimbursement.

What Matters in Medicine begins with three stories of general practice (Dr. John Eskell of St. Briavels, England; Dr. Ernest Ceriani of Kremmling, CO; Dr. E.O. Loxterkamp of Rolfe, IA) from the middle of the 20th Century. It then introduces the reader to Belfast, Maine and the people who call David Loxterkamp their doctor. It concludes with a deeply layered description of primary care at the eye-level of daily practice, with insights that interest students, practitioners, consumers, insurers, and administrators of American health care alike

What Matters in Medicine: Lessons from a Life in Primary Care. The University of Michigan Press, Spring, 2013. 192 pages, including 8 pages of photographs from W. Eugene Smith's photoessay “Country Doctor (LIFE Magazine, 1948), John Berger and Jean Mohr's “A Fortunate Man” (1967), and Claudia Dowling and Lynn Johnson's photoessay “What Makes a Good Doctor?” (LIFE Magazine, 1998). www.davidloxterkamp.com

