

# COUNTRY DOCTOR'66



**The days when Dr. Taylor carried a supply of little pink pills and drove a horse and cutter through snowbanks to reach his patients are now fond memories of this 35-year G.P., who has pioneered in bringing modern medicine to a rural practice.**

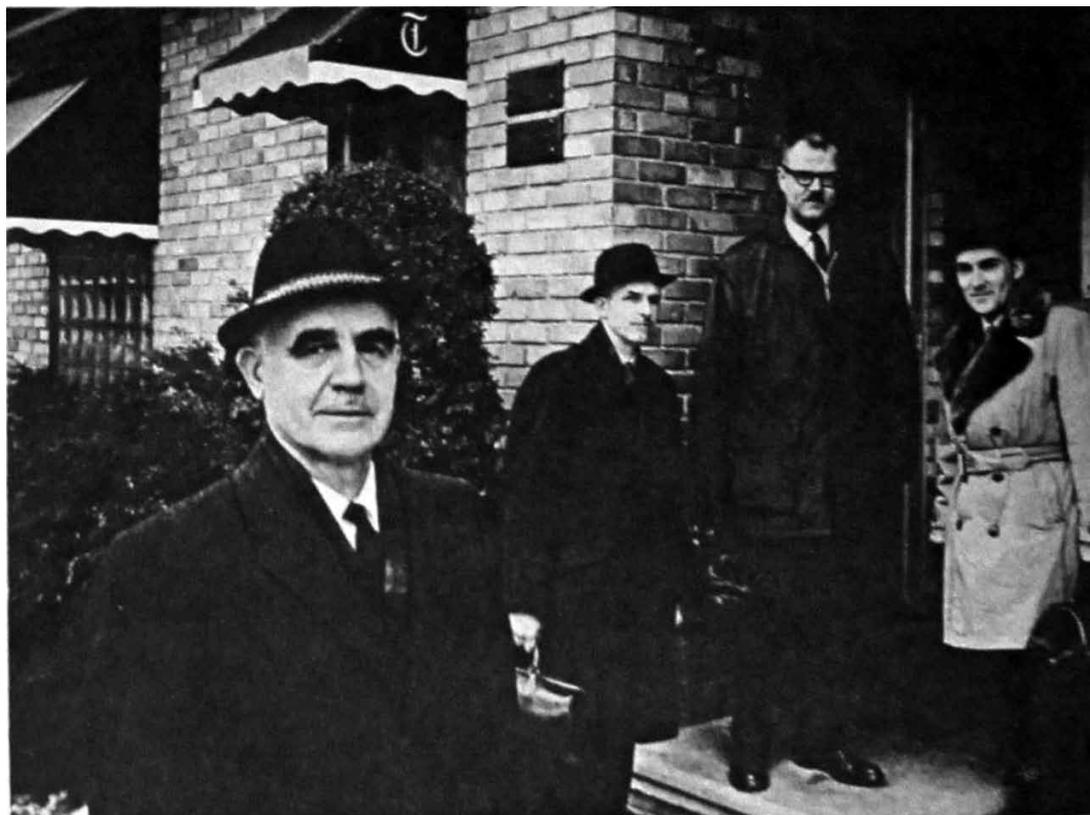
Photographs by KRYNTACONIS



*In the emergency room at Stratford General Hospital Dr. Taylor (centre) removes a lesion. The anesthesiologist, Dr. Bruce Halliday, belongs to the crack medical team Dr. Taylor has built up in Tavistock, a small Ontario town.*



*At Stratford General, Dr. Taylor checks on patient's condition at the chart desk before he visits the wards.*



*Dr. Taylor and his five-man team (l.to r. Drs. Halliday, Gibson and Fuller, plus two other members not in picture), share office building in rear. Their practice is not much larger than the one Dr. Taylor handled 20 years ago but, by working in shifts, they can give an intensive round-the-clock service.*

## Kitchen-table appendectomies are out - wonder drugs are in

TAVISTOCK, ONT

**I**t was the dawn of a blustery winter's day in the 1940's, and Dr. Harold Taylor, general practitioner in the village of Tavistock, 100 miles west of Toronto, had just received an emergency call summoning him to a farmhouse 10 miles away: the young wife of a hired man was about to give birth to her first baby.

Bundling up in an enormous raccoon coat, Dr. Taylor grabbed his black bag and headed off into the country-through drifting snow, in the bleak, cold light of early morning.

The trip wasn't, as the doctor had originally thought, a reckless race with the stork. "I was far too early," he says, "but I didn't dare leave because of the difficulty of returning."

And so he waited - along with the father-to-be who, as the hours dragged by, became more and more agitated.

Finally the distraught man grabbed a gun off the wall, melodramatically pointed it at his head and shouted: "If that baby doesn't come right now. I'm going to shoot myself!"

"That was the best news I'd had all day," says Dr. Taylor, ruefully. "However, I managed to wrestle the gun from him and to pack him off to a neighbor's. The baby was born about supper time, with no further complications."

This is the sort of human drama in which the rural general practitioner became involved "in the good old days," when a bedroom in a remote, snowbound farmhouse often had to be converted into a delivery room, and when an appendectomy might have to be performed on a kitchen table.

"In the '30's, road were often closed for a week at a time," says Dr. Taylor." Now, however, it's rare for them to be blocked longer than half a day" - providing a lifeline to local hospitals with their up-to-date emergency equipment and their crisply efficient staffs of nurses and specialists.

There are many more far-reaching ways in which medicine

has changed in the 35 years in which Dr. Taylor has been in rural practice in Tavistock, population 1,200. The discovery of new cures - and new diseases; of new procedures - and new equipment; the rise of new specialties, and the demand of the public for more intensive treatment.

Drugs, in particular, have revolutionized general practice. Dr. Taylor's black bag of 20 years ago contained an enormous assortments of pills - green, yellow, red and pink, as pretty as the penny candies in an old corner grocery, and just about as effective. "Now I carry only a half dozen drugs - and they work," says Dr. Taylor. "Why, a few month ago a parent came to me with a gasping, dying little kiddie who years ago would have needed a tracheotomy - the kind of operation where a tube is put through the throat into windpipe. I gave the child some steroid and, by golly, an hour later she was sitting on my lap, laughing and sucking her thumb."

This amazing progress in medicine has naturally been a boon to all Canadians, but it has also presented older doctors across the country with a frightening challenge: To revamp trusted and familiar horse-and-buggy patterns of practice to keep up with the rapidly changing times.

"With me, it was literally a matter of survival," says Dr. Taylor. "I was working myself to death on 24-hour call. I even considered moving out of Tavistock to set up practice where I wasn't so well known, just to get away from the grind."

Instead, in 1952, he took on a younger general practitioner a partner. This proved so successful that in the next dozen years he formed a medical group which ha grown to include six general practitioners, three full-time nurses, one nurse's assistant and a clerical staff of three.

The result? A country practice organized along city lines. "Before, I used to say to a patient, 'Come back if you don't feel better.' Now I am able to make a definite appointment to make sure the disease is cleared up," say Dr. Taylor. "There's also a fine opportunity for consultation with six other doctors. Sometimes it's the old fellow with his year of practical experience who has the answer, and sometimes it's the young one fresh out of medical school."

In the past, with one doctor at the service of hundreds of patients it was inevitable that Dr. Taylor's gracious, soft-spoken wife Wilma would end up serving as a combined receptionist, nurse and consultant. Sometime she was even pressed into emergency service.

"Once there was a bad car accident in town and bystanders carried the victim to our house," says Mrs. Taylor. "The doctor wasn't in and I had to exercise what little knowledge I had - such as seeing that he didn't swallow his tongue and trying respiration. It was a dreadful experience, and though I did what I could, the man eventually died."

On another occasion, Dr. Taylor's daughter, Jane Mills, now married to a Toronto lawyer, opened the front door to find a man standing on the steps holding his finger in his hand, as casually as if it were a button missing from his overcoat. "He wanted Dad to sew it on for him," she says. "Our home was certainly an exciting place to be. There were always patients wandering all over - in the dining-room, on the porch, everywhere. Sometimes I felt



*In a modern surgery, ski-accident victim grits teeth as Dr. Taylor prepares to split cast. Unlike old-style rural G.P., this doctor can use up-to-date facilities of a hospital 20 miles away, keep up his practice, study medical developments and even enjoy some leisure.*

**In a country kitchen, Dr. Taylor prepares an injection. To his patients he's one of the family**



## In the days before PSI, payment often came in beef or strawberries



*A call comes at breakfast time and Mrs. Taylor takes it. In the old days she often acted as nurse-receptionist but now there's an office staff and three nurses.*

submerged, but it was thrilling, too. Only thing I didn't like was having to practise piano with everyone there. Fortunately, an old lady once told me that I played *God Save the King* like no one else she had ever heard, so I took this as a compliment and banged it out whenever the crowds got too deep."

Today, the Tavistock Medical Group surprisingly does not have a practice dramatically larger than the one Dr. Taylor handled for 20 years on his own; however, what it does offer is intensive service of the kind uncommon in rural areas where most doctors still operate solo, round-the-clock.

On a typical work day, Dr. Taylor arrives at 8:15 a.m. at his office - a yellow brick building designed by him and his wife and now shared by his medical colleagues. There he sees a few patients, then drives to Stratford General Hospital, about 20 miles away, where he makes his rounds and perhaps performs minor surgery or assists at more complicated operations. After lunch, usually at 1 or 2, he holds regular office hours or goes on hospital calls.

Most important for his patients, there is always a doctor on emergency call, 24 hours a day; and, most important for himself and his partners, there is a reasonable opportunity for leisure and for family life.

There is also time to attend medical conventions and to take some of the many excellent, brief, brush-up courses offered by North American universities. "The College of General Practice does a conscientious job of trying to persuade G.P.'s to keep up to date," says Dr. Taylor, who is past-president of its Ontario chapter, as well as of the medical staff of Stratford General Hospital. "Today there is little excuse for getting rusty."

By contrast, in years past Dr. Taylor lived under the tyranny of the telephone. "Sometimes days would pass and we wouldn't see him even though he was working and living in the same house," says Jane Mills. "We children could never count on a thing. We loved going out with Dad but, if we were supposed to be going to the circus, we wouldn't believe it until we were right inside the tent - and then, half way through the lions, there'd be an emer-

gency call and we'd have to leave. I often thought I'd like to write a book about our life called 'I'm sorry, but. . .'

Occasionally, too, the family would fall into the category of the shoemaker's children who didn't have any shoes. Once, after Mrs. Taylor had heroically sniffled around the house for a few days with a bad cold, unnoticed and unattended, she determinedly put on her hat and coat and lined up in the waiting-room with the rest of the patients. "Dad was pretty impressed with that," laughs Jane.

Though Dr. Taylor has streamlined much of his practice, he still puts 10,000 miles on his car each year making house calls and visiting the old folk in a 15-mile radius around Tavistock. "I never bother to knock on the door," he says. "I just walk in and I'm treated like family."

An old farm boy himself, Dr. Taylor was born "after the turn of the century" in Bracebridge, Ont., where he used to deliver milk from his father's dairy farm. ("That was before anyone thought to put it in bottles. Housewives just brought their jugs out to my horse-drawn wagon.") Later he attended University of Toronto, from which he graduated in 1929 with his medical degree, and then set up practice in Tavistock in a large old graystone house owned successively by doctors since 1870.

"Our life here has been a warm and happy one," says Mrs. Taylor. "We've always felt very close to the people with whom we worked. They are friends as well as patients."

And Jane Mills adds: "As a child, going on farmhouse calls with Dad was a standard form of recreation, so that even today it's the old folks in Tavistock who are my best friends. In a small town you don't just go out and find a lot of children your own age. You have to love people in general. I enjoyed gossiping with each family and raiding their cookie jar, while my younger brother, Bill, who is now doing post-graduate work in surgery, took a more serious interest in the business of medicine - like watching Dad set broken bones."

Today, much of the folksy local color has gone from Dr. Taylor's practice. No longer does he travel by horse-and-cutter through snowbanks, in the half light of early morning. He isn't paid in boxes of strawberries or quarters of beef, and he doesn't have to compete with the local veterinarian or an itinerant peddler for patients.

("Once, many years ago, I was asked over the phone to prescribe an inhalant for a patient who turned out to be a horse," says Dr. Taylor. "I didn't mind, because it was just fair turnabouts. You see, the local vet, a nice old chappie, had gained quite a good reputation among the folk of this area, for treating diabetes, so I didn't mind helping him out by looking after one of his patients.")

In January, 1966, the practice of medicine is much more of a precise and predictable science - which may be a cause of nostalgia, but never of regret, for today the drama lies more in tragedies averted than in incidental human foibles.

"I remember a particularly gloomy time in the late '30's when five men from this area, all with families and in the prime of life, died of pneumonia," says Dr. Taylor. "If I had had the antibiotics then that I do now, those men would probably have lived. Nowadays, it's exciting to be able to try new drugs and to see such wonderful results . . . All in all, it's a pretty useful and satisfying way of life." □

**Early morning call to a  
farmhouse. In the doctor's  
black bag modern drugs  
replace old-style remedies**



*On his rounds in Tavistock, Dr. Taylor checks a young patient's throat and (right) greets Susan, 4, whose birth he supervised, and her mother, Mrs. Doris Roth, also a patient. In spite of go-ahead methods he keeps the traditional country G.P.'s close relationship with people he treats. As Mrs. Taylor says: "They're friends as well as patients."*

