

Two generations of patient care coming to an end

By LINDA HALSTEAD-ACHARYA

Of The Gazette Staff LIVINGSTON - Dr. L. McLean "Mac" Baskett figures it's time.

At 84 - with 54 years of doctoring behind him - he decided to let the young guys take over.

"I'm just going to walk out the back door and say goodbye," he said before hanging up his stethoscope in late August.

Baskett's retirement represents more than closure for his own career. It also marks the final hurrah for a family tradition that traces back to 1917, when his father, Dr. Lindsay W. Baskett, began practicing medicine in Big Timber.

Odd, I was just thinking that for the first time since then, except for World War I, there will not be a Dr. Baskett around to see people in the upper Yellowstone Valley," he said.

The two Dr. Basketts, whose combined years of service total more than a century, remain the only father and son physicians inducted into the Montana Medical Association's "50 Year Club."

Mac Baskett exudes an energy that belies his years. He's more likely to hit the highway for a Griz game or dinner at the Grizzly Bar in Roscoe than spend an afternoon reminiscing about the past. Yet it's evident he feels a sense of pride when talking about his father.

He tells how his father, a Texas native and graduate of the University of Michigan's medical school, came to Montana in 1915 to practice medicine in Plevna. By 1917, he had bought a practice in Big Timber and moved there with his new bride, Adeline. Except for two years as an Army doctor during World War I - he served in France and then with the Army of Occupation in Germany - Dr. Lindsay Baskett hardly left the area.

"He was so devoted to his practice," Mac said. "He practiced up until the day he died (in 1962, at the age of 79). Even when he was sick in bed, patients would come to his house and he'd get out of his sick bed to see them."

Mac remembers his father heading out in a Ford or Nash of the era to make house calls and even calls in the country. When roads were bad, it wasn't unusual for a rancher to meet him halfway with a horse. One time, the elder Dr. Baskett left to deliver a baby and got caught in a snowstorm.

"He couldn't get back for seven days," Mac said. "And he was only a few miles up the Boulder (River)."

Another time, an urgent call came from a ranch up Sweet Grass Creek.

"They told him 'We've got a sick one out here. And incidentally, bring your deer tag,' " Mac recalled, laughing. Translated, the message meant the doctor should get out to the ranch to pick up the deer - already killed and dressed for him - before the game warden showed up. "That sort of stuff happened all the time."

For the first half of the 20th century, Montana physicians were called upon to cover all bases, at any time of day and in any kind of weather. With no antibiotics, they spent much of their time combating infectious diseases. The senior Dr. Baskett's quarantine signs, once posted on a patient's door to warn of scarlet fever, measles and even infantile paralysis (another name for polio), still hang in the Crazy Mountain Museum in Big Timber.

During the Depression, it wasn't uncommon for patients to pay for his services with eggs, chickens or half a beef. But they did so on their own volition. Throughout his career, he never sent out a bill.

"He figured they'd eventually come in and pay him," Mac said. "And most did."

Back then, the tax man was likewise accommodating. The senior Dr. Baskett, known even then for an illegible scrawl, kept his own books. Because the records were virtually indecipherable, the Internal Revenue Service paid him regular visits.

"One year he'd owe them and one year they'd owe him," Mac said, grinning. "I think they just took a wild guess. They probably considered his income by how he was living."

As the Depression waned, doctoring was about to change for the senior Dr. Baskett. In the late 1930s, sulfa drugs arrived on the scene. The new drug, credited with a sharp decline in deaths from infectious disease, had been developed in Germany. In Montana, a Billings physician, Dr. Caraway, was charged with storing the state's entire supply. When one of Dr. Baskett's patients came down with a severe throat infection, the doctor made a dash to Billings for a dose of the new medicine. The patient's quick recovery astounded the longtime doc.

"He was just dumbfounded," Mac said. "He couldn't believe that someone could do so well from an infection that, in those days, could lead to all sorts of things."

A polio epidemic

Interestingly, Mac was neither drawn to follow in his father's footsteps nor to avoid them. Just out of high school, he was putting up hay for a neighbor when his father suggested that he study pre-med at Northwestern University in Illinois.

"Three weeks later, I was on the train to Chicago," Mac said.

It was not until he had completed his undergraduate studies - and just before entering medical school - that he learned he would have to take the medical aptitude exam. To this day, he has no idea how he fared.

"I was accepted," he said. "I was already there."

While interning at Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, he met Elizabeth "Betty" Jones, a student nurse. They married in 1949 and had daughter Susan in 1950. The next year, Mac volunteered for the service and was ordered to Korea. A last-minute change, however, sent him to Germany instead. By the spring of 1953, the family was back in Montana and Mac began his 54-year career as a physician at Park Clinic in Livingston - the same clinic from which he just retired.

His first year there coincided with the second year of a devastating polio epidemic.

"I never saw so much polio," he said. "You were always afraid of bringing it back home to your kids."

Several years later, Park County was selected for testing the trial Salk vaccine. By the second year of the study, but before the vaccine had come out on the market, the vaccine's efficacy became apparent. Mac gathered the last drops from the emptied bottles and inoculated his own children.

Today, Mac marvels at the changes brought about by vaccines and antibiotics.

"You don't see the childhood diseases anymore," he said, shaking his head in amazement when he tells about one young pediatrician who just this year saw her first case of mumps. "And antibiotics have freed up physicians to get into cardiovascular surgery and pulmonary surgery - things not done when I was young."

As a physician, Mac liked obstetrics best. He regrets that he didn't keep a record of the infants born under his watch, but he figures he probably delivered 1,000 babies before stepping back 22 years ago to let the obstetrician take over.

As much as he liked obstetrics, he hated car wrecks.

"There were so many things we couldn't see that were wrong inside," he said. "We didn't have MRIs and CT scans to figure things out for us."

Worst of all, he said, was an incident that took place in Yellowstone National Park. Mac was covering a rotation at Mammoth - the physicians at Park Clinic took turns manning the Mammoth Hospital - when a young boy stepped backward into Ojo Caliente, the hottest pool in Fountain Flats. The super-heated pool scalded all but the boy's head and one upper arm. The child lived three days, then died on Father's Day.

"There was no burn center then," Mac said.

Just as there were tragedies, there were amusing anecdotes. Mac has a keen recollection of the sweltering night in 1959 when a major earthquake rocked the state, creating Quake Lake northwest of West Yellowstone. He was at the hospital delivering a baby when a deep rumble caused the

building to shudder. His immediate thought was that someone had turned on the hospital boilers. It soon became apparent, however, that the earth was shaking.

"About the next pain, that lady delivered," he said, laughing, then added that the woman, who had left the area, stopped by just a few years back. "She came to tell me what happened to the 'earthquake baby.' "

Over the years, Mac has seen trends come and go. While still in medical school, he was taught how to use a baby's weight and length to formulate the precise number of calories per ounce the baby should be fed. Those case-by-case computations marked the origins of baby formula, which later became the primary source of nutrition for infants in the U.S.

"That's what we were supposed to be doing," he said. "Now they've swung back to breast feeding. And that's good, real good."

More paperwork

Just as Mac witnessed modern advancements in medicine, he has also witnessed the pitfalls that come with them - such as antibiotic-resistant infections and the skyrocketing costs associated with life-saving equipment.

Likewise, he has watched the health care industry explode. When he arrived at Park Clinic 54 years ago, three office staffers ran the entire operation, including the Park Hospital and the Mammoth Hospital.

"Now, Livingston health care is the biggest employer in Park County," he said. "There are people all over the place. It's insurance, just paperwork."

Though he sees inherent problems with the prospect of national health insurance, he believes that's where the nation is headed.

"I can't see any other outcome," he said.

Mac's career has not been without frustrations. It angers him when parents don't have their children immunized. It also irritates him when patients fail to heed his advice.

"But you know, most patients will get well anyway," he said, smiling. "So they get well and you cuss yourself for cussing them for not doing what you told them to do."

Taking a moment to reflect, he pointed to a change in public perception that has altered the world of medicine.

"In the days when my father practiced, those docs had primarily loving care while nature either cured or allowed the patient to die," he said. "Now, people always expect the patient to survive. That just isn't the way things happen."

Mac will undoubtedly miss medicine, but it's not likely that he'll lack things to do. An avid fisherman, bird hunter, downhill skier and Griz fan, Baskett is not one to sit idle. Just as he describes his father as "a different breed, more dedicated than we are today," his partner of 34 years, Dr. Dennis Noteboom, credits Baskett for practicing medicine with a personal touch that's no longer the norm.

"His patients have always had that type of care," Noteboom said.

And that's why some of them, like Livingston native Jim Woodhull, find themselves at a loss with Dr. Baskett's departure.

"I guess I can't get sick anymore," Woodhull said. "I always requested him when I went to the clinic."

Dr. "Mac" Baskett has three grown children and three grandchildren. Daughter Susan Lovely is a real estate agent with Prudential Floberg Realtors in Billings. Son Rick is a tax attorney in Missoula, and his youngest son, Jim, who lives outside Columbus, is a longtime salesman for Vann's in Billings. Mac's beloved wife, Betty, passed away in 2003 of pancreatic cancer.

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Australia's medical insurance system is perfect. Most of the locals in Australia pay a tax to pay for the added cost of universal medical insurance premiums to protect their rights. Universal health insurance is basically only national public health system to pay the costs, some people will be extra-to protect private medical institutions in the right medical treatment.

Who needs to pay health insurance costs? Overseas students to take into account the health insurance students are studying in Australia when the accident that may occur and various health conditions established by the insurance system. Every one on a student visa overseas students are required to join the insurance. Students pay premiums only after the visa was approved.

These three elements provided by the policy are in compliance with the Australian government, but in every one of the details is somewhat different, so individual premium is not consistent. Students need to schedule their own choice. Essentially, personal OSHC annual fee of about \$ A \$ 275 yuan from top to bottom. Individual health insurance premiums only cover individual students; However, family health insurance targets include students, spouses and children under 18 years of age. The insurance applies only in the hospital in Australia, and the insurance period from the day the Australian students played the Immigration end of the insurance period.

Some schools will be designated students to the cooperation of the insurance companies listed, some students from comparing the various differences, and by the students themselves with the insurance companies, Jia Bao matters. However, regardless of the method for the students to apply for a visa while the insured has been necessary to produce proof of payment. But on a student visa students attending short courses, may stay in Australia time insuring 3,6 or 9 months overseas student health insurance, but more than a year or more during their students need at least 12 months insured health insurance.

Pathology of consultation fees Physicians inspection fees (for example: a blood test) As X-rays You can choose any of the general practitioner (GP), but if you are not in hospital health insurance will only pay for 85% of the clinics, you have to pay their balance. If it is hospitalized, health insurance will pay 100% of the clinic fee. (By the doctors to open clinics in fees than if the fee schedule set Prepaid expenses, payments from patients). (2) hospitals as in the fee schedule, health insurance will pay the medical expenses of public hospitals, you can also private hospitals, but some private hospitals to open clinics in health insurance costs than the schedule set by the high fee, patients must payment of variance. If you need a hospital for more than 35 days must be that the doctors, or patients can only receive a lower amount of insurance benefits.

About the Author

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