

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Medicine in the Mahoning Valley

Early Medical Practice

O.H. 26

DONALD A. GROSS, M.D.

Interviewed

by

Paul Zimmerman

on

November 20, 1974

DONALD A. GROSS

Dr. Gross of Hubbard, Ohio ran an extensive family practice in southeastern Trumbull County for 55 years, from 1920 to 1975. After graduating from high school in Montoursville, Pennsylvania, he attended Muncy Normal School and the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia where he graduated in 1920. During his time in medical school he was aided by assistance from limited service in the U.S. Navy in Philadelphia.

As a family practitioner, Dr. Gross kept office hours, made house calls, performed his own surgery and delivered babies at homes and at North Side and South Side Hospitals. In this interview, subjects such as training, practice, associates, problems, civic responsibilities, social status, continuing education and economic status are covered. Dr. Gross expressed his attitudes and opinions in a very unequivocal manner and presents definite views in the doctor-patient relationship.

Paul Zimmerman  
May 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Medicine in the Mahoning Valley

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD A. GROSS, M.D.

INTERVIEWER: Paul Zimmerman

SUBJECT: Early Medical Practice

DATE: November 20, 1974

Z: This is an interview with Dr. Donald A. Gross, M.D. for the Youngstown State University History of Medicine in the Youngstown and Mahoning Valley, by Paul Zimmerman, at 362 West Liberty Street in Hubbard, Ohio, on November 20, 1974, at 5:45 p.m.

Z: Dr. Gross, just what influenced you to become a doctor?

G: Well, when I was small, I lived next door to a doctor and I used to drive his horses for him. I got interested in it that way. I lived in a country town, Montoursville, Pennsylvania and there weren't very many automobiles at that time. This doctor used three horses, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. He used to get tired, so he'd let me drive. A lot of times patients from out in the country would come in, and have no way to get home. They'd hitch a ride to see him and he'd call me to take them home. I could take them about anywhere in the county.

Z: I see. What was this doctor's name?

G: Dr. J. W. Van Horn. He wasn't such an old man, but he was awfully busy.

Z: He must have been if he needed three horses a day. Did he give you any help later on in your career?

G: No, no. He never knew I became a doctor. He was dead before I even started to study.

Z: I see. Then, as you were going through high school you pursued this idea of becoming a doctor?

- G: Well, the more I thought of it, the more I wanted to be one because it looked like a pretty easy life. For Dr. Van Horn it was. He never seemed to work very hard, but he seemed to make a lot of money although he didn't ever keep any of it. He lost it all in gambling.
- Z: Could you give us some of the impressions you had of what medical school life was like and the attitude of the students of the time?
- G: Well, I went to medical school when it only took five years. We didn't have to go to college to get a degree. They gave you your one year pre-medical course right at the college. Then we went into medicine. I didn't think it would be very hard when I started, but after the first year of it, I didn't think I would ever be a doctor. I didn't think it would be possible to ever get through.
- Z: Did it seem like there was a multitude of knowledge to learn?
- G: It seemed like I didn't know anything. It was quite a change from high school.
- Z: About how old were you when you graduated from medical school?
- G: I was twenty-one.
- Z: Did you go into practice right away or did you have to serve an internship?
- G: I served an internship for one year at Youngstown Hospital.
- Z: What influenced you to come to Youngstown?
- G: Well, I had a roommate who lived in Youngstown and he got me to come out here. I was, originally, from Pennsylvania. That's where I had hoped to go back and practice.
- Z: Have you ever regretted coming to Youngstown?
- G: No. No, Youngstown's been pretty good to me. I can't find anything to complain about it.
- Z: In what year did you come to Youngstown?
- G: I came here in 1919.
- Z: You arrived in Youngstown in 1919 and you served your internship.

G: Yes, I served from 1919 to 1920.

Z: You were in the Navy. Could you tell us some things about that?

G: That wasn't much of a deal. It happened when I was a junior in medical college. I had gotten up that far in school and I didn't think I would ever be able to make it through the rest of the course. I was running out of money pretty fast. There was a drive on to enlist Navy recruits, so about fourteen of us went down to the Navy yard and enlisted. They told us, at the time we enlisted, that they would call us immediately for service, but we never got called. They sent us back to medical school and we finished. They paid us one hundred and ten dollars a month and we got our board where we wanted. They also allowed us money for food.

Z: Was this a big help to you at the time?

G: Well, it was the best help I ever had. I would never have gotten to be a doctor if it hadn't been for that.

Z: You had one of the first G.I. Bills in existence, then, so to speak. Did you have to serve overseas at all or anything like this?

G: We never even saw a boat. The only thing we had to do was pass inspection on Saturday mornings. There wasn't any drilling to it, but we had to be shined up like a new dime when we went to school on Saturday mornings. It took only a second. We just walked quietly by the officer and he just saluted and that's all there was to it.

Z: I see. When you came to Youngstown, then, could you compare the doctors in Youngstown to the doctors in Philadelphia? Was it stepping down or was it about the same?

G: No, it was about the same. I thought there were pretty good doctors over in Youngstown. They had some pretty smart doctors.

Z: In what year did you establish your practice?

G: 1920.

Z: Did you establish it in Hubbard in 1920?

G: Yes.

- Z: What made you decide to come to Hubbard?
- G: Well, the mayor of Hubbard, at that time, was a patient in the hospital. They had five doctors here in Hubbard, but they were all about eighty years old. He wanted somebody that was younger. He told me that he'd pay my office rent if I'd come over and establish a practice. Although he never did pay the office rent, he did get me over here.
- Z: Was he a good politician?
- G: Yes. It was a good move because I had only been here a month when the 1920 flu epidemic broke out and it was very simple to make money. I thought it was because a thousand dollars a month was a big salary at that time. I was making more than that. Of course, when the flu epidemic was over, it went down.
- Z: Did that help you establish a pretty strong practice then?
- G: Yes. I had a very strong practice. In fact, I was so busy I didn't know whether I was coming or going for a long time.
- Z: Where did you have your first office?
- G: I had it down on North Main Street. It was about two stores down from Riordans'. I don't know what the number was.
- Z: Do you remember the name of the mayor that influenced you to come here?
- G: Charles White.
- Z: Charlie White. Did you use a horse and buggy or did you buy a car to start out your practice?
- G: No, no, I started out with a car.
- Z: Was that one of your first investments?
- G: That was one of my first investments. In fact, it was a gift from my mother when I started. She gave me some money to buy equipment and that was the first thing I bought. I think I drove that car about a hundred and fifty thousand miles. It was a good car and I never had much trouble with it.
- Z: What kind was it?

G: It was a Dodge.

Z: Dodge?

G: Yes. It was a good car, one of the best. I think during my lifetime, I must have had about five Dodges. Oh, I've had every kind of car there is. I've had Cadillacs and Lincolns, and Oldsmobiles, and Buicks. I've used all of them, but I didn't ever drive them over a year.

Z: I see. Except for the first one.

G: Well, the first one I drove a long time. There was never anything wrong with it, so I just kept driving it. There's no use buying a new one.

Z: You needed the car for your business. Was most of your practice done in the office or was it mostly house calls?

G: No, at that time it was mostly house calls. I had a young fellow who drove for me and we traversed this whole Trumbull County. We would start out in the morning and I would have about thirty calls to make and then I had office hours only in the afternoon. Then we'd start out after office hours and make about thirty more calls. It was a busy time.

Z: How many days a week did you work?

G: Every day.

Z: You worked seven days a week?

G: You didn't have any days off then.

Z: Did you work every day during your internship?

G: Well, of course, you don't have to work too hard as an intern. That wasn't too tough.

Z: You thought that was pretty simple compared to what happened later then.

G: Yes.

Z: Who were some of the doctors in town when you came to Youngstown?

G: Oh, there were the Clarks, A.M. and C.R., Sherbondy, Alsaesser, Buechner, M. P. Jones, Bierkamp and Joe Buchanan. Of course, Fenton and Scofield, Alsop, Jack Lewis, and Ed Goldcamp were all of the old gang.

- Z: Were most of these men family doctors?
- G: No. Goldcamp was a nose and throat man. He was the first man to do laryngoscopies and so forth. Lewis was a g.u. /genitourinary/ man. He did a lot of work that hadn't been done before in g.u.
- Z: Well, since you knew these men, how much of your practice did you send to other doctors. Did you deliver babies yourself or did you have another doctor do them.
- G: Oh no. I delivered babies. I don't know how many, but I delivered them for so long that I got sick of delivering babies. I finally decided to quit because patients always called me at night or at some time when I wanted to go someplace or do something.
- Z: I see. Well, you started to tell us what a typical day was like. What things did you treat in your office?
- G: Oh, I treated sore throats and colds and stuff like that.
- Z: Did you handle broken arms and that kind of thing?
- G: Yes. I did all kinds of fractures and everything in the medical line. In fact, I was on the surgical staff at the Youngstown Hospital for about twenty-five years.
- Z: You didn't need the services of another physician to be a surgeon. You were the surgeon, too, for your patients.
- G: Yes. Well, I got that in my training as an intern at the hospital.
- Z: I see. Did you treat patients for things like eye glasses?
- G: Oh no. No, I wasn't a specialist in that.
- Z: What kind of medications were available in the 1920's?
- G: Well, there wasn't too much. We had no antibiotics and we didn't have much medication except for fevers and coughs. We used to have a heck of a time stopping coughs, but we got them stopped.
- Z: What would you say were the most serious diseases at that time?
- G: Well, there was pneumonia, typhoid, diphtheria, and whooping cough and things like that.



- Z: There wasn't much you could do for any of them. Is that right?
- G: No. They did have a vaccine for whooping cough that worked very well and of course, diphtheria antitoxin was very good.
- Z: Getting back to the hospital now, what were your impressions of the hospital? Did you have to hospitalize very often?
- G: Do you mean, did I have to send patients in?
- Z: Yes.
- G: I had to send quite a few patients in. That is, I sent in acute appendixes and gall bladders and things like that.
- Z: Would you perform the surgery yourself?
- G: Yes, yes.
- Z: So you made rather extensive use of the hospital.
- G: Yes.
- Z: Who would you say were the leaders in the hospital at this time? Who were the men that ran it?
- G: Dr. Morrison was probably a leader. He did more for the hospital than anyone else. He collected money and started to build the South Side Hospital and then he got subscriptions for the North Side Hospital and built that. I think he did more for them than anybody.
- Z: I see. On an every day basis, which doctors had control over things at North Side Hospital?
- G: Well, Morrison had more control than anybody. I'd say Morrison, Buechner and Sherbondy probably had more to do with the running of it.
- Z: When doctors practiced in Youngstown, did they basically stay with one hospital or did they travel back and forth between South Side and North Side?
- G: No, they traveled back and forth. If you were on the staff at South Side Hospital, that automatically put you on the staff at North Side Hospital.
- Z: I see. About how many doctors were there in town during the 1920's on the staff of the hospitals here?

- G: I wouldn't know how many there were over there because my work was mostly done over here in Hubbard. I was over there almost every day in surgery.
- Z: How many other surgeons were there?
- G: Well, they had Sherbondy, Buechner, M. P. Jones, Bill Alsop, and John Buchanan. Sidney McCurdy and Carlos Booth were mill doctors. They took care of examining employees for mills and taking care of their accidents.
- Z: I see.
- G: Sidney McCurdy was head of the Sheet and Tube department.
- Z: Was industry a big business for doctors in Youngstown?
- G: That seemed to be the biggest business. The mill doctors were the fellows that made the money and did the work.
- Z: Did the industrial plants support the hospital at all?
- G: Oh yes. They still do.
- Z: You mentioned some firsts of some doctors. Did you ever have any firsts in medicine that you came up with? Did you do anything first in Youngstown or in this area?
- G: No, I didn't do anything that I'd say was a first.
- Z: Did you ever cooperate in any kind of a project that would be a first in town?
- G: No.
- Z: Have you ever written anything in a medical journal?
- G: No.
- Z: Have you ever had anything published?
- G: No, I never had time then.
- Z: Did you ever get around to it in later years?
- G: Well, I have plenty of time now, but I'm about three-fourths or four-fifths retired now. I don't make any house calls and I just take care of a few of my old patients here. I go to the nursing homes to see some of the patients.
- Z: What are your impressions of the nursing homes?

- G: Well, when they first started, I didn't think much of them because doctors couldn't get much cooperation with the nursing home, but they're much better now.
- Z: Would you say they get fairly good care in most of the nursing homes around here?
- G: Well, I'd say they got very good care.
- Z: Okay. You were fairly successful in the 1920s, you said. Did the 1930s create any problems for you with the depression?
- G: Well, no. I got sick in about 1928 and Clark and Alsop and some other doctors called me into the hospital office one day, and said, "Take off your clothes." They scared me half to death. I didn't know what they were talking about. They went over me and told me I had tuberculosis and that I'd have to quit practicing for good. I thought that was a hell of a time to tell me that because I had four little kids and expenses were pretty high.

They sent me up to New York to Trudeau Sanatorium for a year. I got so tired up there of Trudeau. I felt fine all the time I was there. I didn't feel like I had anything wrong with me, but they tried to convince me that I had. I said, "You're crazy. I don't have it." I got to know the x-ray man up there, and he would take pictures of my chest and let me examine them. Of course, I had access to all his pictures. I could go in and look at anybody's x-rays. It didn't matter to him. He would take mine and put them up and I'd study them but I could never see anything in them. He said he couldn't see anything in them either.

I had two of the outstanding chest men in the country taking care of me and they wouldn't let me out of there. They said I had to stay there. I got tired of the place and I thought, "Well, I've got to get out of here somehow." I told them I had to go home to build a part on to my house, so that when I got out of the hospital, I'd have a place to stay. Well, they let me come home for three days, but I never went back. I went to Tuscon, Arizona. They had given me a letter. I wrote to them after I came home and asked them if I could go out there or go someplace else. They gave me a letter to a couple of doctors out in Tuscon. I visited them, but I only stayed there a week because it was too hot for me.

I went on to California and spent almost a year out there. I didn't do anything except lay around on the beach and play with the kids. I didn't do any work.

I had lots of opportunities to go into practice out there, but I didn't, primarily because my wife's folks all lived back here and she wouldn't stay out there. She would stay there now, but she wouldn't then.

Z: I see. When you came back to Youngstown then, did you have a clean bill of health?

G: Well, nobody ever gave me a clean bill of health. I wrote to the insurance company. I had spent a lot of my money, when I was making it, on insurance. It paid me pretty well when I wasn't working. They sent me a check every month for about fifteen hundred dollars and that would keep me pretty well in those days. I was never bothered with any money matters. When I came back here, I wrote to the company and told them to cut off my checks because I was going back to work. But no doctor has ever discharged me from having TB.

Z: Was TB very prevalent back then?

G: Well, it was a lot more prevalent than it is now. Of course, now they have drugs that can fight it. But they didn't have anything then.

Z: What was the treatment for TB in the 1920s?

G: Well, mostly you just rested and got fresh air.

Z: Did many people die of pneumonia?

G: Well, an awful lot of them died of pneumonia. Pneumonia seemed to be different than it is now. Now you get a patient with pneumonia and you give them a big shot of penicillin or some other antibiotic and in a few days, they're over it. In those days, they'd run a high temperature, spiking up to one hundred and four or one hundred and five. Then they'd have what they call a crisis. The patient broke out in a sweat and his temperature dropped down and then he'd start getting better. Pneumonia doesn't act that way now.

Z: What drug would you say was the one that helped you in your practice the most?

G: I have no idea.

Z: What was your impression of the sulfa drugs when they came out?

G: Well, they were very good. I got very good results with them.

Z: Did you have any qualms about using a drug like penicillin?

- G: No, I used an awful lot of penicillin.
- Z: What year did you come back to Hubbard and resume your practice?
- G: Oh. Well, I left here in 1928 and I came back in 1933. Well, when I went out West, I got one of the boys that was an intern to come and take over my practice. I told him he could have my cars and use my house and use everything. He wouldn't have any expenses on that part; he just had to keep the practice going. Well, when I came back, I had a couple of jobs as a mill doctor at Valley Mold and Powell Pressed Steel, and they were good paying jobs. This boy had been interviewed by them and tried to get those jobs away from me. He stayed here in Hubbard, but he didn't get them. I got those jobs back again. Then he left and went down South somewhere and became a professor of orthopedics.
- He took the job here because he had to wait a year or two before getting that job in the South and he didn't have anything to do. He was waiting for the opportunity to come up. When I came back, he had tried to get these other jobs because he made good money and I guess he figured "Well, if I can do that well in a small town like this, I may just as well stay here." He went down to Birmingham, Alabama.
- Z: I see. When you came back, were the people in town here able to pay your fees?
- G: Oh yes.
- Z: They were able to pay?
- G: Yes.
- Z: Some of the doctors I've talked to said that they had trouble collecting fees during the 1930s because nobody had any money.
- G: I didn't have any trouble collecting fees. That didn't seem to bother me at all. I have more trouble collecting them now than I had then.
- Z: Really? That's fantastic. Would you say the mill jobs helped the doctors quite a bit during this time?
- G: Well, they helped out because that was a constant pay. The mills paid you regularly and you didn't have to depend on private individuals.

Z: You've talked about some of the doctors who looked at the money aspect of medicine and thought how successful they were going to be. Do you see any difference between the doctors today and the doctors yesterday, as far as this is concerned?

G: Well, to me, it seems that the younger doctors are primarily interested in making money. I don't know how they manage it, but they seem to do pretty well. Ever since I've been around, I've noticed that the younger doctors would buy big cars and put on a big show, and buy a real nice house. They all seem to do pretty well.

Before I started my practice here, I came over and interviewed all of these old doctors, McMurray, Bond and Button. There are a few more but I can't think of their names now. I asked them if they had any objection to my starting in Hubbard. They all said no, and that they would be glad to send me work, and they sure did send it to me.

Z: Are McMurray, Bond, and Button the three doctors that were already here in Hubbard?

G: Yes. They were three of the oldest doctors. They only had partial practices, like I have now. They didn't work all the time.

Z: I see. Could you tell us a little bit about some of these doctors. What were they like and how long had they been practicing. Do you know anything about them?

G: I don't know how long they had been practicing. I know Bond did pretty well. He built an apartment house and he had some land at the center of town from which he made a lot of money. He was quite an inventor. He invented or built the first automobile he drove. He was a very versatile fellow.

Z: Was he one of the leaders of the community?

G: No, he didn't have much civic pride, but he was certainly a smart fellow. He invented a black mixture he gave to every patient, it didn't matter what they had. Whether they had diarrhea or pneumonia that black medicine cured them all. When he died, I bought out all this stuff he had and there was about four or five gallons of that black medicine. I had people writing in from all over the state of Ohio for that black medicine of his. I finally used it all up. I didn't know what was in it because he never told me. But he said that it would cure anything.

GROSS

Z: Did it cure anything?

G: No, I don't think so. I didn't think much of it. It didn't do anything for me. These people that had used it thought it did. As long as they thought it worked I thought, "Well, let them use it."

Z: Did you ever have any other problems? Did you have any problems with people taking home remedies of their own or anything like this?

G: Well, most of them took home remedies at the time. They had all kinds of cures for everything and they'd use those before they came to a doctor. But, ultimately, they'd come to see me.

Z: Did any of these remedies work that you know of?

G: Oh, in obstetrics, a lot of the babies that were born here were born by midwives. I mean they had a bunch of midwives that would go out and take care of the delivery. I've had calls many a time to help them out.

Z: To help out the midwife?

G: Yes, they would get stuck and they couldn't deliver and I'd have to go out and put on a gown and help them out. Doctor Button used to get in a lot of trouble with it because he didn't know how to put on forceps and he was a big man. He was about six feet, six inches tall and he had big hands and he couldn't get into a woman's pelvis very well. He used to get into trouble delivering and he'd call me out, primarily to give an anesthetic so he could do it. He always ended up giving the ether and I did the work.

Z: Did you have any problem with home abortions or anything like this back in your early days?

G: Well, we had plenty of premature labors or I suppose they were abortions. Sometimes I'd get women who were trying to get rid of a child. I'd get calls for women who were bleeding badly. I would have to put them in the hospital and pack their uterus and then go in and take out the packing and usually the placenta would come out with it.

Z: I see. Have you noticed any change in people's attitudes toward doctors in Hubbard over the years?

G: No. The only thing I noticed is that they always go for the newest doctor that comes in. They go to him rather than to the older ones.

- Z: They're willing to try a new doctor right away, then?
- G: Yes. We have five osteopaths here and they're so busy that I don't know when they sleep. I have an office girl here who works for me on Saturdays. She does my tax work, but she had worked for me full time a few years ago, when my son was practicing with me. We had to have two nurses and two girls to work on taxes and fill out papers and so on. That's when we got her. But when he quit, I fired all the help we had because I couldn't afford to pay them. The expense was too high. I was paying out of the treasury more than I was making for a while.
- Z: Back in the 1920s, when you first started in practice, were you able to afford to have a nurse and an office girl?
- G: No, I had a girl that I trained and she was pretty good. I trained her to give hypodermics and do minor things. She's still working for me.
- Z: Oh, that's fantastic.
- G: She was off for one or two years when we built the building down there and hired full time nurses. We let her go. But then when I had to get rid of the building and had no place to put these people, I had to let them go. I called her and asked her if she wanted to work again. She said, "Yes." So she's still working.
- Z: Were you called to do anything during the second world war, as far as military service or public service? Did your practice go on as normal, then?
- G: It was the same. I was too old for the draft. They didn't want fellows like me.
- Z: Did you ever get involved in local politics or civic activities in Hubbard?
- G: No.
- Z: Did you continue your education? What did you do to keep up with medicine?
- G: Well, I have taken about ten trips abroad and six or eight trips down to South America and the Bahamas and West Indies. I got started going on these trips with our Jefferson Medical College. They started putting on seminars. The first one was in Paris and then the next one was in Vienna, and then Madrid. Each year for two weeks they sent us to about ten different countries in



Europe. We had professors from over there. That's the only thing I've ever done, as far as continuing education.

Z: Did you find that the seminars were a help in your practice?

G: Oh they helped because you learned something new every time. I had some certificates here of those trips. I don't know where I put them. I had a bunch of them out here the other day. I think I just gave them to Mary and said, "Here, you can burn these up."

Z: In your work as a surgeon, what would you say were the greatest advances in surgical techniques over the years?

G: Oh the greatest advances were in the types of material in the instruments they used. They use different materials now than they did when I was doing surgery. All we ever used was cat gut and silk. Now they use stainless steel and this fish line or whatever they call it for suturing. It's made out of fish line and is very strong and very smooth and easy to handle. The most advances are in the materials used.

Z: Does that enable a surgeon to do a better job?

G: Yes. He can do a better job and he doesn't get the recurrence.

Z: Was recurrence a big problem?

G: Well, yes. You used to get a lot of recurrent hernias and so forth. You used a chromic cat gut for stitching and it would dissolve the cord before it was time and let the sutures break open again. Then you had to stitch it over again.

Z: Were the advances in the anesthesia any help to you?

G: Well, they were a great help. Now they do a lot of spinal anesthetics. Those give you complete relaxation with very little bleeding. They're very helpful, if you can get somebody that knows how to give them.

Z: What sort of anesthetics were in use when you first started practicing?

G: Oh, when I started, we used ether and chloroform. Those were about the only two.

Z: What came next?

- G: Well, then, next came nitrus oxide and then spinal anesthesia. Now I don't know what they use. My son is a specialist in anesthesiology. I don't know what he uses now. I haven't talked to him about anesthesia for a long time.
- Z: Did you work with your son?
- G: We had an office downtown. We built a building down there and we were in it for about 7 years.
- Z: So was he an expert in anesthesia then?
- G: No. He hadn't started then. That's why I had to sell. He was going to get an easier job than that. He took a course at North Side Hospital and spent two years on a residency there in anesthesiology. Now he's one of the anesthesiologists up at St. Joseph's Hospital in Warren.
- Z: I see. Do you think there are excessive demands made on a doctor's time if he's in family practice?
- G: Well, I don't think so. A lot of people do think so, but I don't think so. Of course, people go to a doctor a lot more often than they did in the old days. They used home remedies for a while and then if they didn't die they went to a doctor. Now they go to a doctor every time they get a sniffle or a running nose or something.
- Z: What would you attribute this to?
- G: Well, I suppose it could be attributed to the fact that people make more money and they take better care of themselves.
- Z: Did you have any problem with people not trusting you to treat their sons and daughters?
- G: I don't think so.
- Z: Did you have any problem with the various immigrant groups or ethnic groups or anything like that?
- G: No. That's never been a problem, as long as I had an interpreter that could tell me what it was all about.
- Z: Could you tell us some more about these other doctors that were the mainstays of the Youngstown Hospital Association? What was your impression of men like Dr. Morrison and Dr. Alsaesser and Dr. Fisher?

- G: Well, Dr. Morrison would make rounds every day, but Sherbondy would make rounds and work for only two days a week in surgery. Buechner would work two days a week in surgery. M.P. Jones would work whenever he could get in or whenever he had something to do and so did Alsop. They worked every day if they had something to do. I don't know how it is now. I haven't been up in surgery at North Side Hospital for over a year.
- Z: Would you say the surgeons worked pretty hard then or were they pretty independent?
- G: Oh, they were pretty independent. They all had nice homes and made good money.
- Z: Would you say surgery is one of the best branches of medicine as far as the monetary rewards?
- G: That's the branch I liked best when I was doing it.
- Z: I see. Do you think it takes a special breed of man to become a surgeon?
- G: I don't think so. I think anybody can be trained to do that.
- Z: You don't think it takes any special skills or anything like that?
- G: I don't think it does.
- Z: Did your practice change over the years as to what you performed for people?
- G: Well, it changed in this respect: I don't have any mill work to do anymore and I don't have any suturing or fractures or things like that. I used to have a lot of those cases. About all I have now are sore throats and maybe the sniffles or something like that, but it's not enough to keep me half way busy.
- Z: Have you had any very interesting cases over the years that you'd like to tell us about? Are there one or two that stick out in your mind as being very interesting in maybe the treatment or the disease?
- G: No. Back when I was doing it, I had a lot of them. I don't remember now. I can't pick out one that would be more interesting than the others. They all used to interest me then.
- Z: Well, give me an example of a typical day in about 1935. What would you have been doing from the time you got up? At what time did you get up?

- G: I got up at six thirty and I was out of the house by seven thirty. I didn't have any hours until one o'clock so I'd make calls from seven thirty to one or I'd go to the hospital. I was on the staff and helped to take care of all the indigent cases that came in. I was over there nearly every day.
- Z: Were these indigent cases much of a problem to you. Were they a big percentage of your cases?
- G: Well, yes, they were a big percentage. Practically all my cases were indigent cases. Most of the surgery I was doing then was free surgery. The patients didn't pay anything. I don't think they even paid the hospital. The city of Youngstown paid the hospital.
- Z: Who paid the doctor then?
- G: He didn't get paid.
- Z: What good was it to be on the staff then?
- G: Well, that's the way the doctor was supposed to learn. That's where we got our start.
- Z: I see. They didn't have anything like insurances at that time? You mentioned that you had the insurance on your health.
- G: Well, I bought insurance because I had many friends who were insurance agents. They were always trying to sell me something and the more money I made, the more I spent for insurance. When I first started my practice I bought stock from many stock brokers. There were a lot of young fellows out on the streets selling stocks. They sold me many thousand dollars worth of stocks. That's how I bought the insurance.
- Z: But this wasn't a prevalent practice at the time.
- G: No. I don't think very many fellows were buying much insurance then. I bought it on the advice of these older doctors. My banker said, "If I run the bank the way you run your office, there wouldn't be any bank and there wouldn't be any money for anybody because you don't know whether anything is good or not. You just buy whatever they put on the table for you." And I did, I guess.
- Z: Do you think that doctors have become smarter about the business end of their practice over the years?
- G: Yes.

- Z: Do you know anything about the origin of Blue Cross in Youngstown?
- G: No, I don't know anything about the origin of that.
- Z: When did the Blue Cross first start showing up? In your practice, when did people start having health insurance?
- G: Oh, I think it began about fifteen or twenty years ago. I couldn't tell you for sure because I don't remember. When it first came out, I bought it and I've been paying into it ever since. It has paid me back because I was in the hospital in California with meningitis and I was out there for three months. They paid me all the time I was out there.
- Z: Did these indigent patients in the hospital help you in any way as far as your surgery went?
- G: No. They were in the hospital where the doctors could work on them and fix them up and watch them right straight through to see if anything happened afterwards.
- Z: I see. Then in later years, this was good experience for you to have.
- G: Yes.
- Z: That hospital work didn't make your living then. Your living was made by your family practice back here in Hubbard.
- G: Well, I did make money on hospital cases. When I had worked enough years in the hospital for free, then I could operate and charge for it. It made quite a difference in my income.
- Z: I see. Would you say that most doctors in the 1920s and 1930s were well-to-do or middle class? What was their economic status?
- G: No. I think the fellows that practiced just plain medicine had kind of a hard time because they didn't make much money. The fellows that did surgery, though, did pretty well.
- Z: Were there very many specialists in the 1920s?
- G: Well, the specialists, I think, have always done pretty well because people could afford them. If you had money and spoke with a specialist he would help you out. But you couldn't talk about specialists to people in the low

income class because they couldn't pay and the specialists had to get paid. They had to do a lot of pre-work too. They still do. They still have to take out tonsils and stop hemorrhages at the hospital at almost any time of night if they're on staff.

Z: As far as you know, has there ever been anyone neglected in medical care around this area?

G: I don't think so. There hasn't been anything that I know of.

Z: How would you rate the medical care in Youngstown?

G: I'd rate it very high, from what I've seen elsewhere.

Z: I'd say you're a pretty qualified observer having been all over the world and viewed things. How would you compare our hospitals to what you saw overseas?

G: I think our hospitals are better than the ones overseas. Of course, that's my personal opinion. Maybe I didn't see all of the hospitals here but they seemed a lot better to me. I saw a lot of hospitals overseas. They were old buildings. The plaster was coming off the walls and they looked like they should have been torn down and replaced. They weren't kept like they are here.

Z: I see. How many specialists were there in the 1920s? When did the age of specialization arrive in medicine?

G: Oh they had a neurologist. They must have had six or eight nose, throat and ear men.

Z: Who were the neurologists?

G: Smeltzer and Sam Weaver were neurologists. Sam later moved out to California. He didn't stay here very long.

Z: Who were the nose and throat men?

G: Oh there were a lot of them.

Z: Who were some of the outstanding ones?

G: Well, there was Hartzell, Goldcamp, Walker, Bierkamp, Ray Hall and Vern Goodwin. They're all gone now except John Goldcamp. He's doing only eye work and he's busy most of the time. Peabody's in with him. I don't think they have a corporation but they just share the same offices.

Z: Were the specialties a fairly lucrative business in the 1920s?

- G: They seemed to be.
- Z: Do you think that doctors, as a group, take many vacations? Did you notice that?
- G: Well, I always did until lately. Of course, I guess I do take as many now as I did then. It was a little easier to take vacations then. I had more money.
- Z: Well, you didn't always just take working vacations, then, is that right?
- G: Oh no, no, no. I used to take a month off and go over to the mountains in Pennsylvania in the summertime when the kids were small. My mother had a cottage up in the mountains right where two streams converged and the kids had a great time up there. I'd take them up there for a month.
- Z: Do you know anything about the foundations of the x-ray department at the Youngstown Hospital?
- G: I know John Heberding founded it. Then Ed Baker came on after Heberding. Heberding had the first x-ray in the hospital and he had an office up on Rayen Avenue. He died quite a long time ago and I think Baker took over then. After Baker came Dr. Frances Miller. She must have been over there at the hospital now for twenty or twenty-five years.
- Z: Did you know anyone else associated with the foundations of the Hospital besides Doctor Heberding or did he work pretty much alone?
- G: No, I think he trained Baker and some of the other fellows that are over there. They have so many people there now that you can't tell who's an x-ray man and who isn't.
- Z: Where did Doctor Heberding get his ideas?
- G: Well, he just came up with them himself.
- Z: So Doctor Heberding was an original thinker. Was he a pretty clever guy?
- G: Yes.
- Z: If you could do anything in your practice over again, would you do anything differently?
- G: No, I think I would do it just the same.

- Z: You'd do it just the same way? You'd run it pretty much the way you had it planned?
- G: Yes.
- Z: Doctor Gross, do you have an opinion about the government intervention into medicine?
- G: Yes, I do. I think they should keep their hands off because they make it worse. They pay for the poor people's doctor bills and so forth. It sends an awful lot of malingers to the doctors' offices. They come in here and I don't think there is a thing wrong with them. They seem to be apparently all right. They keep coming back and filling up your waiting room and then they all have papers that have to be filled out. My girl just keeps busy filling out papers all the time and answering the telephone because they're always calling for papers or something that's free. They don't have to pay for it so they just ask for it.
- Z: Do you see any difference between this and the derelect cases that used to have to go to the hospitals?
- G: No, I think probably the derelect cases that went to the hospital were treated better than they are now. For example, I have a patient who's about eighty years old. He had diabetes and hypertension and he had a stroke on his left side. He's paralyzed and can just barely talk and he can't hear very well.

He could afford to pay his hospital bill if they would have given him a bed, but they wouldn't give him a bed. They wanted him on Medicare. Well, I finally got him into the hospital on Medicare and they wanted him out of there in three days, and into a nursing home. They didn't want him taking up a bed and just laying there eating and sleeping and being bathed.

Yesterday I signed him out of the hospital and I went to the nursing home where I signed him in and he wasn't there. I didn't know what had happened to him. So I went back to the hospital and he was still there. It made me so mad because there was no reason for him being kept there. I asked a nurse whether the papers weren't filled out right or what the trouble was. She said, "The papers weren't filled out right by the wife" I said, "Well, she hasn't been too well herself and she lives in Pennsylvania. It's hard for her to come over here to the hospital every time they want something."

I told her I would get the woman to the hospital and she could fill out the papers so we could get the man out of



there and into a nursing home. I thought he'd get better care over at the nursing home than he would in the hospital because they weren't doing a thing for him in the hospital. He's in a nursing home right now.

Z: Do you think that poor people in the 1920s got health care that was as good as it is now?

G: I think they did.

Z: Was the health care available, then, even though they couldn't afford it?

G: Oh yes.

Z: Do you see any need for health insurance or anything like that?

G: No. I don't see why somebody should come in and look over my records and look over my patients because that's between my patients and me. It should be confidential. You don't know who these PSRO fellows are. You don't know if they're working for the federal government or what.

Z: What exactly is this regulation?

G: Well, the regulation is that every doctor is under the supervision of some other doctor. You don't know who he is or anything else about him. He's supposed to go over your records and see that everything is according to Hoyle and those birds down in the federal government that have charge of the regulation of medicine. None of them are doctors. They just make their rules and that's it. There doesn't seem to be any restraint on them.

I think there are a few hundred thousand AMA members that have quit because of PSRO and joined the unions of their own. I don't think that's right either. The AMA is supposed to be a society for the prevention of any mistreatment or any unjust manipulation of patients. They have always done a pretty good job, but of late, they are losing more members than they're getting.

Z: Did you support the AMA right from the beginning of your career?

G: Oh yes. Yes, I've been an AMA member. I just paid my dues today of three hundred and eighty four dollars. Some county societies suspend your dues after you've been a member for fifty years. You're still able to be a member, but you don't have to pay dues. In Trumbull

County you still have to pay dues. I paid mine today. They didn't have to be paid until the first of January, but I thought I might as well get it out of the way.

Z: Are you in the Trumbull County Association, then?

G: Yes. Well, I was in the Mahoning County Association when I was doing surgery and so forth. I was an associate member of Mahoning and a regular member of the Trumbull County Association,

Z: I see. What kind of self policing did doctors have back in the earlier days?

G: Well, I don't know if they had any kind of self-policing. If somebody got in trouble, they went to the chief of whatever service they were on and explained it to them and they would get helped out of service. Now, I don't think you can even do that.

Z: Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing?

G: Well, I think it's bad because it interferes with a lot of good doctors.

Z: What happened if a doctor was doing something wrong? Who did something about it?

G: Well, he would just be suspended.

Z: Who would do that?

G: The trustees of the hospital would suspend him.

Z: How did they find out about it? Were the trustees medical men themselves?

G: Well, the trustees weren't medical men, but when the doctor went for help they investigated him. If they found that he had done something wrong they would bring him on the floor and give him a chance to explain why he did it. If the trustees thought he was wrong they'd fire him. They didn't waste any time.

Z: In the 1920s if you had done something that someone didn't think was right would you have been approached about it?

G: Oh yes.

Z: Who would have done this? Would it have been one of these doctors that you mentioned here before?

G: Yes.

- Z: Which one in particular, do you think?
- G: I suppose Dr. Morrison approached more of them than anyone else.
- Z: What was his method of dealing with doctors?
- G: Oh, he was pretty smooth and he was a politician, too. He could get by with about anything.
- Z: Was he fairly well respected then?
- G: Yes.
- Z: Who would you say is the most respected doctor in Youngstown, at this time?
- G: Well, I suppose Bill Bunn is probably the most respected.
- Z: Who was the most respected in the 1920s?
- G: Well, in those days, it would be C. R. Clark and Doctor Welsch. There were a lot of good ones at that time that were pretty high up in medicine.
- Z: Could you tell us a little about C. R. Clark? What do you know about him?
- G: I don't know too much about him except that he was one of the head medical men here. Anybody that was very sick usually had him in consultation and what he said went.
- Z: Who would you go to for consultation on a patient if you had a problem that you couldn't handle?
- G: You mean in those days?
- Z: Yes, in those days.
- G: Well, I went to Clark.
- Z: You went to Clark.
- G: Well, I went to Clark and Morrison. They all went over me and pounded around and told me I had TB. That's why I didn't think they knew so much.
- Z: You had something on them. Do you have any other impressions about doctoring over the years?
- G: No. I just read in the paper about the PSRO. The article read, "Building Planned. The hospitals get warning." Now, a fellow my age can't even operate a case in the hospital. I wouldn't even be allowed to go up in surgery because I'm just too old.

- Z: Well, is there some kind of arbitrary date that they set?
- G: Yes. You're through at sixty-five. I was reading about these things this afternoon.
- Z: Did doctors have much independence back in the 1920s and 1930s?
- G: Oh yes. I think they did.
- Z: Could you do what you felt was right?
- G: Well, I thought so. I played a lot of golf and spent a lot of time playing golf with these older doctors. I had no trouble getting along with them. Of course, there were a lot of people that didn't play golf that well, or couldn't afford to join the clubs, so they just never got out. If you invited them out, they were tickled to death.
- Z: Well, how do you view this today? Do you think the doctors want that much independence today? Do you think the younger doctors will fight for it?
- G: They want it. Yes. They want it because several of them have asked me to sign their applications for admission to the Golf Club. I don't think they ever turned them in because the admission is about two or three thousand dollars for the first payment. Then it runs over a hundred and some dollars a month just to belong to it, even if you don't play at all. I don't play anymore, but my bills still come in and they are over a hundred dollars a month. I get out there two or three times a month for a lunch or something, but they are really expensive lunches.
- Z: Do you think this was an important thing in your life as far as your professional practice went? Did it make it easier?
- G: Well, it made it easier for me because I met the heads of these big companies there and then they'd employ me. For that matter, I think it helped a lot.
- Z: One final question. Do you see any difference in the attitudes of the younger doctors? Is there a difference in a young doctor in his late twenties or early thirties now and you when you were the same age?
- G: Oh, I don't imagine there's a whole lot of difference. When I was that age, I was pretty energetic and so are the kids now.

- Z: Do you think they're looking for more security today than you had or was it just about the same?
- G: I suppose it was just about the same.
- Z: I see. Can you think of anything else that you would like to say?
- G: No. I probably said too much already, but that's the way I feel about it.
- Z: That's fine. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW