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Autobiography & Memoir

It's Probably Nothing: More Adventures of a Vermont Country Doctor
Beach Conger
Chelsea Green
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"So when it comes to the actual patient, well, you don't usually get too involved," Dr. Beach Conger is informed upon joining the staff of a large Philadelphia hospital. For the prior two decades, Dr. Conger had been practicing medicine in a small town in Vermont, where he was intimately involved with his patients, their families, and their medical histories, and ministered to their multiple medical needs. In big-city, modern medicine he discovers such roles as Primary Care Practitioner, Officist, and Hospitalist. Attending Physicians, he is told, do not attend to the patients, but rather to the residents. Patients are referred to Specialists for each individual malady.

It's Probably Nothing is Dr. Conger's account of his experiences practicing medicine in such vastly different environments. As to whether the book should be considered Fiction or nonfiction, Conger includes an amusing "Author's Note" in which he avers, "the whole concept is absurd. The only important question in a work is whether or not the author, in telling his tale, has told the Truth."

Conger relates stories about his patients with wit, humanity, and humility. His unique voice creates a feeling that the reader is sitting next to him, listening to a storyteller practice his craft. These stories range far beyond medical issues to include the character and lives of the patients and illuminate larger concepts. While the fictionalized patient names are a bit cutesy (Fusswood, Hiram Stedrock), the interactions are truly touching and never sentimental, even when dealing with life-and-death issues. The reader is also treated to interesting sidelines into the annals of medical history, Vermont winters, the town's history, and literary references to Shakespeare, Dickens, Plato, Chekhov, and more.

A graduate of the Harvard Medical School, Dr. Conger serves on the faculty of Dartmouth Medical School. His previously published books are *Bag Balm and Duct Tape* and *It's Not My Fault.* Near the end of this volume, he muses: "The old ways I have learned are just

that. It reminds me of what one of my colleagues said, just before he retired: ‘You know, Beach, we old internists are like the gray wolves. We cover a lot of territory and we’re finding it harder and harder to find a suitable habitat. We are an endangered species.’”

Readers will agree; this is a species that deserves special protection.

Karen Mulvahill