Dr. Philip Bachman, Medical Director of Midwest Occupational Medicine.

Blazing the Trail in Medicine Began in Cold Spring, MN

by Tammy Paczkowski

Medical Science could be referred to as the "final frontier". For a moment, reflect on the amazing and life saving achievements over the past 150 years: the artificial heart, x-ray, CAT Scan's and MRI's to peer inside the body without surgical invasion, antibiotics, most notably penicillin, hygiene and sanitation, anesthetics, which one could only imagine facing surgery without it, and minimally invasive and robotic surgery are just a few of the discoveries and breakthroughs that have saved millions of lives. There are a couple Rocori area physicians that have made their own unique contributions to medical history in Minnesota as well, a century apart!

Consider the life of the "country doctor". Most lived very modestly while devoting their lives to the welfare of others. They rarely had "offices" outside of their home and often traveled long distances to treat and tend to their patients. Dr. Pierre C. Pilon was one such physician. Born in Ontario, Canada, Dr. Pilon setup his practice in Cold Spring in 1887 and later moved his practice to Richmond in 1891. It has been documented by William Mitchell in 1915 that Dr. Pilon made the decision in 1892 to "devote his future entirely to surgery". In 1893, Dr. Pilon went to Europe where he completed two years of post-graduate studies and improved surgical techniques to promote shortened recovery and disability time. He then moved to Paynesville, MN, where he became the head surgeon and notable member of that community as well. Dr. Pilon advocated public sanitation and served as the county coroner for two years.

In "modern times", there is another physician that picked up where Dr. Pilon left off in terms of devoting their lives to "shorten recovery and disability time", but, in a different way. A century later, in 1987, two practicing physicians left Cold Spring, leaving the community without a doctor. Dr. Philip J. Bachman was "fresh out of residency in family practice" and came to Cold Spring to serve the community until a permanent replacement would be found: Dr. Frank Barnaby. Dr. Bachman practiced medicine in Cold Spring for two years and fondly refers to them as "the best years of his life"!

As a young Family Practitioner, born and raised in Minnesota, Dr. Bachman, treated patients for everything from colds and flu to delivering babies. Family doctors, much like the old "country doc", generally seem to strike up fairly close relationships with their patients, as they have been known to treat some patients from cradle to grave. Dr. Bachman is no exception. As a matter of fact, Dr. Bachman remembers a time that touched his very soul: "It was an 85 year old man telling me not to worry about the tumor in his lung, His exact words were "doc do not worry about it. If I walk out the door and die, I'm ok with it, you need to be ok with it too."

It wasn't long before Dr. Bachman heard his "calling" to occupational health, which he defines as, "The health as it is effected by the occupation. The training is expansive. Understanding how lead impacts a bridge worker, how a welder is affected by chromium, understanding substance abuse in the workplace, caring for back pain, knowing government standards, caring for an injured worker, understanding the
risk of a needle stick in a health care worker, considering safety of the public in a nuclear power plant or of a truck driver." Dr. Bachman's interest in occupational health began with concern for his patients and two Cold Spring companies: Cold Spring Granite and Gold 'n Plump. "I would tour the companies frequently, and since my patients spent half of their awake life there it was important. Both had leadership which was dedicated to a change in making the work environment safer. The CEO gave directives to actually change the work environment to make it safer for its employees. As both of these companies did so, I saw the injuries decrease, and the health of the employees change. My part in this was to relay to the companies what the causative factors were in the injuries. They then found solutions", states Bachman. And so began his future in Occupational Health!

Soon after Dr. Barnaby began practicing in Cold Spring, Dr. Bachman moved on to further his education and completed a "mini-residency" in Occupational Medicine in 1990 in Cincinnati, OH. He then went on to earn a Masters Degree in Public Health, Degree Program in Occupational Medicine, Department of Preventive Medicine. Medical College of Wisconsin, M.P.H. which he received May, 1997. In addition, Dr. Bachman has medical licenses in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

What motivates him most about occupational health? Dr. Bachman simply states that, "It's hard, constantly changing. The worker compensation system is hard on all parties involved. I like that added degree of complexity. The workers inspire me. These are the people who help put the food on the table or make the things I enjoy! They will likely take care of me when I’m old."

Occupational health has seen many changes over the past 20 years and no employer should feel "exempt" from occupational health care. "Government regulations have increased. Our knowledge is constantly changing. Improving the health and safety of your employees will reward your companies. If one studied Gold n Plump and Cold Spring Granite to their counterparts, one would learn quickly that changes for the betterment of the employees not only pay back economically, but in the overall wellbeing of a community. The best strategy for an employer is prevention. Involvement of employee is key. Often they will not only help identify potentiality troublesome situations but will supply the solution", said Bachman.

So, where are the trends moving in Occupational Health? Dr. Bachman states, "Unfortunately, from the medical side, there are less of us in Minnesota in a multi-industry clinic. There are approximately 20 total boarded occupational medicine doctors in Minnesota, most are administrators of larger companies. The smaller companies have a difficult time in understanding and complying with government standards which impact the health of their employees and keep them compliant." Dr. Bachman also educates employers and employees by way of seminars on various pertinent subjects involving occupational health. The latest was this past March on "Sleep Apnea and the Truck Driver". One could say an "ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"!

If you were to sum up his career thus far in occupational medicine, Dr. Bachman said, "I have to say I learn more from my patients than I teach them. I think I have one of the greatest jobs in the world. The labor force is one of the best in the world. They do things that no one else can do. I know the Navy will
come to central Minnesota to find the best welders. Think about it. Central Minnesota is filled with hard
workers who take pride in all they do. It's rare to find!"

So, you see the parallels between the careers of Dr. Pilon and Dr. Philip Bachman. Both began their
medical careers in Cold Spring. Both physicians have devoted their careers to the health and welfare of
their patients by "shortening their recovery and disability time", just in a different way! And lastly, both
Drs. Bachman and Pilon have blazed the trail in new medical territory in the state of Minnesota! Indeed,
we've come a long way from tinctures and Carters Little Pills!

Should you have any further questions or inquiries, feel free to contact Dr. Bachman:

PHILIP J. BACHMAN, M.D.,M.P.H.
MIDWEST OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE
1301 33rd ST. SOUTH
ST. CLOUD, MN 56301
320-251-9675