

General Practice in Northern Wisconsin

Joseph P. Cox, MD

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I had an experience, on entering the profession, of working for nothing for so many years in charitable hospitals, that when I finally swung my shingle to the breezes of Northern Wisconsin, and a victim strayed into the office, I felt almost as if I were a thief to accept any pay from him. It took me a great many years to get up courage enough to demand a decent fee, and I presume several of us (if the truth were only known) have been in the same boat.

From the time we enter the profession we are told (if we have a good preceptor) that our calling is a humanitarian one, that we would have many years of starvation, and that we must have an ambition to enter the profession only for the good we can do. These are the teachings I received, and I have no doubt the majority of you received the same. But when a man has served his term of service, when he has worked his way through school by the sweat of his brow, as I have done, when he has worked for nothing, and as our friend Ole Oleson would say "eaten himself" for many years, he should then demand good pay. The popular

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Doctor Cox was from Spooner, Wis.

impression that obtains among the people is that we are willing to do almost anything to secure experience. In this respect there are more idiots in general practice than in any other calling I know of. I feel this when I look back years ago when I was driving through Sawyer and Washburn Counties day and night, running 2 to 4 horses to death, flattering myself that I was making an enormous amount of money, wearing myself out, breaking myself down—and I did break down as you all will do if you follow my example—and what was the result? I was spending all I made and collected from those who did pay me to take care of those who did not pay. I was so busy that I could not pay proper attention to my family. Frequently a doctor's family is the most neglected family in the community, and yet, we own them as much attention as other families receive—otherwise a woman who marries a doctor is a very foolish woman.

I think, after we have reached a certain point, after we have studied as we should do and gotten in touch with medical literature, after we are equipped with ripe experience, then we should put on the brake and say to ourselves: I do not want to do so much work, but must do better work and for that work I must be paid.

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