

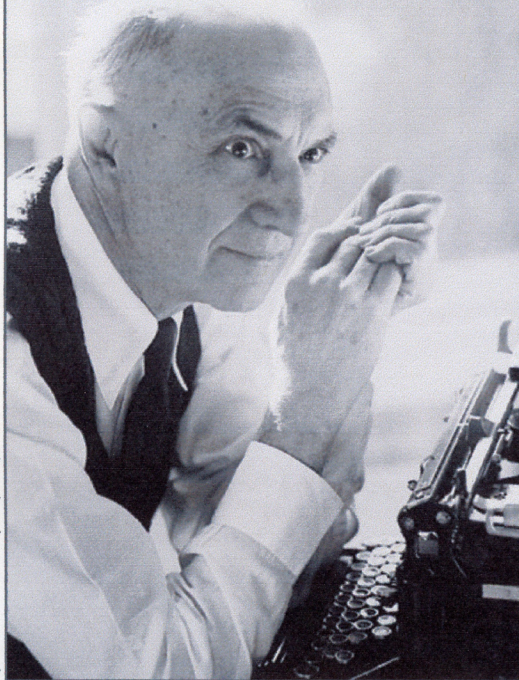
HOUSE CALLS WITH WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, M.D.

By Robert Coles, with photographs by Thomas Roma. 109 pp., illustrated. Brooklyn, NY, powerHouse Books, 2008. \$29.95. ISBN 978-1-57687-475-2.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883–1963) was a pediatrician who made house calls from Rutherford to Paterson, New Jersey. Despite the daily grind of working as a physician, he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his poetry.

Williams received his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1906, at the age of 23. After a 2-year internship at the now-closed French Hospital in New York City, Williams continued his training with a third year at the nearby Nursery and Children's Hospital. He spent a year (1910) as a pediatric postgraduate student in Leipzig, Germany, and from there traveled through Europe. After returning home, he started a private practice in his hometown of Rutherford, New Jersey. Eventually, he became head pediatrician of Passaic General Hospital in nearby Paterson.

This is how Williams described his life as a physician–poet in his autobiography (*The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*. New York: Random House, 1951): “I had my typewriter in my office desk. . . . If a patient came in at the door while I was in the middle of a sentence, bang would go the machine — I was a physician. When the patient left, up would come the machine. . . . Finally, after eleven at night, when the last patient had been put to bed, I could always



William Carlos Williams, 1954.

Lisa Larsen/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

find the time to bang out ten or twelve pages. . . . [But] no matter what I was writing, the practice always came first.”

Williams’s poetry flourished during two sabbaticals — the first in 1924, and the second in 1927. He was, however, not isolated in Rutherford, a town of about 9000 inhabitants in 1920. New York City was within easy reach if he headed south on the old Route 17. In New York and in Europe, he met Wallace Stevens, James Joyce, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Ernest Hemingway, and many other writers. Ezra Pound was a friend from his medical school days. In his lifetime, Williams wrote one medical article (published in the *Archives of Pediatrics* in 1913) and more than 600 poems. Many of his poems are in the idiom of his blue-collar patients (as he put it, “from the mouths of Polish mothers”), and many are visions perceived on house calls with his poet’s eye: “Sweep the house / under the feet of the curious / holiday seekers — / sweep under the table and the bed / the baby is dead —” (from the poem “The Dead Baby”).

House Calls with William Carlos Williams, M.D., is a celebration of Williams’s 125th birthday. Woven

through the pages of this lovely book are one-paragraph essays by Robert Coles, himself a winner of a Pulitzer Prize; short poems by Williams; and photographs of Paterson by Thomas Roma. When he was a medical student, Coles accompanied Williams on his house calls and later wrote about him and promoted his literary work. His comments, laced with quotes from Williams, lay bare how Williams’s doctoring influenced his literary work. Roma’s stark black-and-white photographs, taken along Williams’s routes through Paterson, document the poverty and decline of a once-thriving industrial city. The poems call out with sad passion. The book is a loving tribute to William Carlos Williams, M.D.

Robert S. Schwartz, M.D.

Book Reviews Copyright © 2008 Massachusetts Medical Society.

CORRECTION

Sorafenib in Advanced Hepatocellular Carcinoma (July 24, 2008;359:378-90). A correction is described in the Correspondence section of this issue of the Journal (Sorafenib in Advanced Hepatocellular Carcinoma [December 4, 2008;359:2497-9]).

NOTICES

Notices submitted for publication should contain a mailing address and telephone number of a contact person or department. We regret that we are unable to publish all notices received. Notices also appear on the Journal’s Web site (www.nejm.org/meetings). The listings can be viewed in their entirety or searched by location, month, or key word.

BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

The “Baylor College of Medicine GI and Liver Course 2009” will be held in Houston, Feb. 6 and 7.

Contact the Office of CME, Baylor College of Medicine, 1 Baylor Plaza, MS: BCM 155, Houston, TX 77030; or call (713) 798-8237; or fax (713) 798-7955; or e-mail cme@bcm.edu; or see <http://www.baylorcme.org>.

8TH ANNUAL FORUM FOR IMPROVING CHILDREN’S HEALTHCARE

The forum will be held in Grapevine, TX, March 9–12.

Contact the National Initiative for Children’s Healthcare Quality, 20 University Rd., 7th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138; or call (617) 301-4900; or e-mail forum@nichq.org; or see <http://www.nichq.org>.

THE JOURNAL’S WEB AND E-MAIL ADDRESSES:

For letters to the Editor: authors.nejm.org

For information about the status of a submitted manuscript: authors.nejm.org

To submit a meeting notice: meetingnotices@nejm.org

The Journal’s Web pages: www.nejm.org