

Physicians' faith plays role in work

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Catholics are "doers," according to Dr. Louis J. Papa, a parishioner at St. John of Rochester in Fairport.

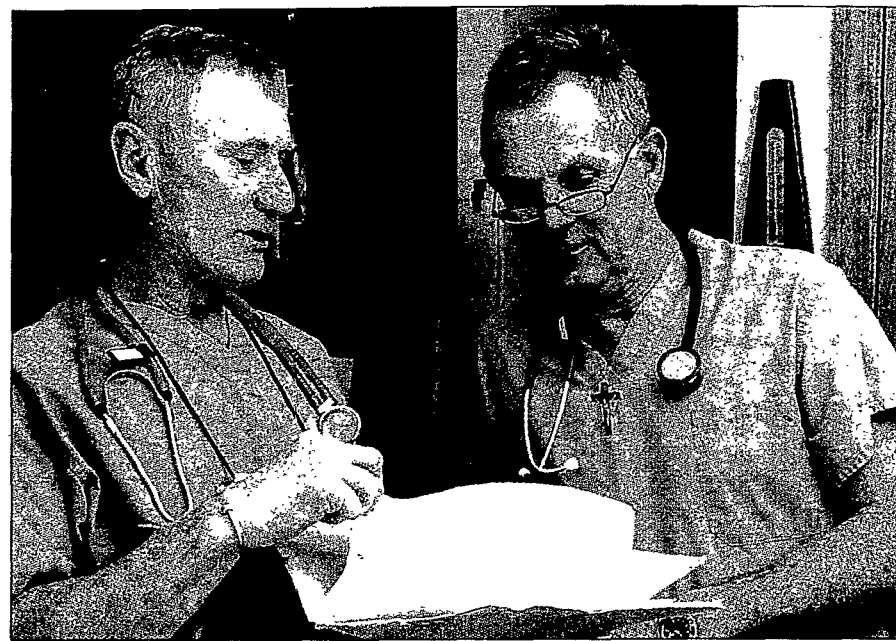
"It's not just going to church and hearing what's said," Papa added. "It's doing what's said. If you look anywhere in the world where there's a situation or crisis, (Catholics) are the first to step in, and I'm proud to be a part of that."

Papa volunteers at St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center in Rochester, which is sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph. As one of its many services, the center provides free or

low-cost health care to low-income people. Papa said he believes physicians have a duty to give freely of their services when they can.

"You can complain as much as you want, but we have a good lifestyle compared to the rest of society," he said of physicians, adding that he often treats those who live on the streets. "In these homeless individuals, we have to remember that we see Christ in them."

However, like other Catholic physicians, Papa said there are a growing number of challenges to that desire to serve others through medicine. He noted, for example,



that he has less discretion now than he once did to waive or discount patients' fees. This is because physicians' employers as well as public and private health insurers have moved to standardize copayments and fees, saying physicians are not able to judge patients' financial needs, Papa said. Employers and insurers plan on enforcing copayment amounts, citing contract agreements and policies, he added.

Health-insurance issues, however, are far from the only ones challenging Catholic physicians. For example, Dr. Joseph P. McCormick, chairman of the ethics committee at St. James Mercy Health System in Hornell, noted that from abortion to euthanasia, the church's position on protecting human life from conception to natural death is often under attack.

"I think it's our job to be the champions of the respect for life," McCormick said of Catholic physicians.

One obstetrician/gynecologist who's willing to champion life is Dr. Katherine S. Lammers, a parishioner of St. Rita's Parish, Webster. Lammers works with a number of crisis pregnancy programs and noted that being a pro-life woman in her

field of specialty is "politically incorrect." Nonetheless, she said she presents patients considering abortion with as much information as possible about the possible negative physical and emotional effects of abortion — as well as the help available to them if they choose life.

"They're aware of all the choices that Planned Parenthood offers, and I want them to be aware of all the options available to help them to choose to parent or to adopt out," she said.

Dr. Paul P. Povanda, D.O., a parishioner at St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads, works at St. Joseph's Hospital and Arnot Ogden Medical Center, both located in Elmira. Like other diocesan physicians, he said he doesn't impose his religious views on his patients, but his faith does affect how he treats them.

"I would hope that being brought up Catholic makes me a better physician," he said. "I would hope that everybody I deal with on a daily basis is affected by the fact that I'm Catholic."



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