

From “Pharm” to Physician

“Do you remember me? Do you remember my nephew?” asks Hector(not his real name) expectantly. Dr. Nawrocki turns his head sideways running his eyes over the man’s face. Suddenly a faint memory of a 40 year old gentleman with an angry 19-year old man comes back to him. He vaguely remembered the physical ailment of the young man but what stuck in his mind was the last conversation that he had with the nephew. Not only did he not know about his eternal destiny but he did not want to talk about it! “Yes, I remember. How is your nephew,” asks Dr. Nawrocki politely. Hector can hardly wait for him to finish the sentence and with a huge grin tells him, “Those questions about his eternal destiny, Doc, changed his life! Not many months later he gave his life to the Lord!” With that exciting news, Hector launches into the whole story while Dr. Nawrocki checks his vital signs, makes a diagnosis and provides free medicines for his problem. With a smile, Dr. Nawrocki walks the patient to the door just as another family walks up to the church building. “Are you Doc Rock?” asks the gentleman. His wife is standing next to him holding a little girl about 2 years of age wrapped in a blanket. The dark circles under the mother’s eyes are deep from lack of sleep. There seems to be a faint sign of tears as well. Doctor Nawrocki nods his head and smiles when he hears this couple use the nickname that many have given him including his own grandchildren. He ushers them inside to a room that has Life Clinic on the door. After a few minutes of conversation, he learns that this family took their daughter to the Emergency Room with a 105 fever. They were distraught with the high fever and desperate to have their little girl well. When the attending physician diagnosed the problem, he gave them a prescription. Their anxiety grew when they discovered that they would not be able to afford the medicines that their child would need. They arrived at the Life Clinic when a pastor across town encouraged them to go see this “Doctor who will not charge for the visit or the medicines. He does this because he loves Jesus and people”. In a few minutes Dr. Nawrocki assessed the toddler’s health and offers free medication to them. Tears of gratefulness spring up in the mother’s eyes. Before leaving, Dr. Nawrocki prays the father will find work and the new baby the mother is expecting will be born healthy. In no time the hours have flown and it is time for Dr. Nawrocki to close up Life Clinic for the day. With a satisfied sigh, Dr. Nawrocki locks up and thanks the Lord for another productive day in the clinics.

If you had asked Dr. Nawrocki when he was a little boy what he wanted to be when he grew up, he might have told you he didn’t know. Perhaps he would have inherited the family farm. But God had other plans for Joseph Nawrocki and the farm was the “training ground” that would give way 40 years later to Rock’s Medical Outreach.

Born on May 28, 1949 to Cyril and Bernice Nawrocki, Joseph William Nawrocki was the only boy of four children. Dr. Joe grew up in southern Minnesota just outside of Trimont. Going to church was the weekly social outing when you were part of a farming family. Dr. Nawrocki fondly recalls the special birthdays and holidays that helped to break up the mundane farm life. Most of his time was spent learning how to raise crops and tend to livestock while attending school. Baseball and Football ended up being

distractions from planting and harvest, so Dr. Joe was unable to participate in many sports except for wrestling since this occurred during the cold winter months. While in high school he found time to serve as Vice President for the 4H club and participate with FFA (Future Farmers of America). Dr. Joe experienced pain with wearing shoes and the only pair of shoes that fit comfortably was his “barn cleaning boots”. As a result, the other students ridiculed him because of the strong “barn smell” that came with him. In spite of this, school was a welcome escape from farm chores so he eagerly studied and his grades reflected it. Dr. Joe received high grades and was on the honor roll in his high school years. He found learning fun and a good change from the farming life. However coming from a small farming community with no financial means, going to college was not an option he felt he could pursue. His grades kept him from being expelled but he remembers the high school principal discouraging him from pursuing college because he would “never make it” with that rebellious attitude.

With very little money Dr. Nawrocki began looking for a job outside of the farm. The next year was spent living in town and working as a “grease monkey” for the local co-op gas station. Restless for something more out of life, but having no real expertise except for how to raise chickens, plant, and harvest, pump gas and fix flat tires, he began seeking other job alternatives. With the draft getting close, he found himself enlisting in a different “farm” but equally as intense in discipline and work....The United States Air Force. When deciding what field of the Air Force to enlist in, his dad gave him one piece of advice: “Son, you know about mechanics, you need to sign up something you don’t know about so you can learn.” That something was electrical engineering.

Dr. Joe entered a phase of intense learning with 9 other gentlemen...all of them with college degrees except him. Dr. Nawrocki “fondly” remembers a time being as intense as some of his time in medical school. The driving force for him to succeed this time was not to escape the farm. If he flunked, he would not be able to graduate and attend his own wedding day! Again, he managed to graduate and on May 10, 1969 he was wed to his sweetheart, Mavis Cottew. The newly weds headed for Colorado where he was currently stationed. The work load was not heavy and he enjoyed the opportunity to travel. From Colorado, he was transferred to Spokane Washington and then to a 30-month tour at Karamursel AFB in Turkey.

While in Turkey, Joe and Mavis (“Rusty”) found themselves in a new school. Through a series of friends, they both came to accept Jesus as their Savior. A new desire to learn more about Jesus spurred Dr. Nawrocki to get to know Jesus and the call that God had placed on his life. It was during this military tour that Joe took an aptitude battery test. The results were surprising. Based on this test his highest skills and recommended occupations were listed: physician was at the top of the list followed by Biochemist, Personnel counselor and religious counselor. Six and a ½ years later, married with 2 children under the age of 5, Joe entered college at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. His only comfort was that he felt like the Lord had told him to go ahead and he would be with him. Dr. Joe assumed if God told him that He would receive all A’s but was not what he promised! Still he completed his undergraduate studies with a double degree in Chemistry and Biology with an accent on Biochemistry while maintaining 3.94 grade point average. The Nawrocki family moved to Duluth, Minnesota to complete medical school at the University of Minnesota. From there it was

on to Sioux Falls, South Dakota to complete residency. By 1985, he finished college, medical school, and residency with 4 children and school loans up to his ears! When making a decision as to what field of medicine he would like to pursue, Dr. Nawrocki put it this way:” **I like the variety, no fellowship was required since I was already married with 4 children. I needed to start earning an income rather than incurring more debt. The real decision as I look back was between Family Practice and Emergency Room. I am an Adrenalin junkie-thus my love of the ER. ER pays better and you can leave it when you go home. However, Family Practice lets you get into the lives of the people. I guess I liked both worlds so I always had "two jobs", Family Practice and ER.** After spending so many harsh winters up north, Dr. Nawrocki was looking for a warm place to “set up shop”. For the next 5 years Dr. Nawrocki poured his heart into medicine in Florida and later in Georgia.

In 1990, Joe was invited to go on a mission trip with New Covenant Church to Guatemala. It was during this time Dr. Nawrocki felt like the “missionary bug” bit him. Every year he would seek an opportunity to go on a mission trip. Most of his trips consisted of several “bush clinics” where the team would set up in the middle of a village and offer free medical care to the people there. Dr. Nawrocki began doing what he calls a yearly reflection. He noted each mission trip he had taken over the year were the times when he experienced the most spiritual growth and the greatest fulfillment with his gifts and talents. It prompted him to seek out more opportunities to go on mission trips.

After moving to Texas, Dr. Nawrocki settled into a partnership practice with four doctors. After 2 years, he was hired for a satellite clinic in a growing suburb of Ft. Worth but that was short-lived. In 2000, Colombia Medical decided to get out of the clinic business so Dr. Nawrocki was faced with a difficult choice: He needed to buy them out of the practice to continue or he would have to fold the clinic. He decided to take a step of faith by closing out this practice in order to pursue another dream...international medical missions. The dream that God was birthing in him was to provide medical care for the homeless and needy in the United States and around the world. The doors to introduce them to Jesus would be through free medical care.

If God was calling him to offer free medical care internationally, how would he do it? The first challenge was to consider the financial needs. The obvious answer was seemed to be going full time Emergency Room.

One day while in the Emergency Room working, a co-worker who was a professed atheist started ridiculing him saying,” Here comes Dr. Goody Two Shoes. He can help people in other countries but he’s too good to do it here.” Even though it wasn’t meant to be nice, Dr. Nawrocki saw the truth in the statement. It spurred him on to do something about it. Dr. Nawrocki joined Dr. Ramirez who was offering a free medical clinic located in Ft. Worth. Unfortunately the clinic closed several months later due to lack of funds. Dr. Nawrocki began sharing his dream with his church home and a few colleagues. There seem to be a favorable response towards doing this. With a humbled heart, Dr. Nawrocki wrote letters to friends and family asking them to pray about supporting this endeavor by giving of time, prayers and resources. Rock’s Medical Outreach began to take on more definition. Some local churches embraced the idea. Life Clinic I opened in March, 1999 at Grace Temple Church in Ft. Worth, Texas where he was licensed and ordained. It started out under a stairwell in the corner of their gym. With the help of Ron and Donna Coffey of Ministries of His Glory, Life Clinic II opened in

Nicaragua and then another in Ft. Worth. By 2003 Cornerstone Community Outreach had opened their doors to provide space for Life Clinic IV. Joe's wife and daughters stepped up to help with secretarial and administrative duties.

Today, Dr. Nawrocki works in the clinics weekly Tuesday through Thursday. Friday and Saturday is still Emergency Room time since the giving thus far has helped to meet some of the clinic expenditures only. Last year alone, Rock's Medical Outreach spent over \$339,000 but only \$25-30K of it was in monetary form. The rest has been in the form of gifts. For example, Sam's Wholesale donated eye glasses. Last year, Dr. Nawrocki gave one pair to a lady in Nicaragua who cried because it was the first time in years that she could really see! King Pharmaceutical has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars on medicines. To date, Dr. Nawrocki has been in at least 20 countries outside of the states on medical mission trips. The US clinics see up to 28 people in a single day and as many as 100 patients daily on medical mission trips.

Dr. Nawrocki continues to exhort and pray for other physicians who might share his desire to be ambassadors for Christ to the "uncared for". He knows that paying for malpractice in addition to other costs and offering free medical care do not necessarily go hand and hand. His hope is to be able to share some of the workload among doctors, retired or active, and nurses. A mobile clinic would be a tremendous asset to facilitating more care in an efficient way but the cost of one mobile clinic is considerable (about \$12,000) and the upkeep is more than RMO can do right now. **"Finding more help or money is not necessarily the challenge, it's doing it God's way instead of mine"**, says Dr. Nawrocki.

In 2000, Rock's Medical Outreach started to organize mission trips for medical care providers. The Life Clinic in Nicaragua usually receives a visit twice a year and giving to RMO helps to support a full time local doctor and nurse for this clinic. Dr. Nawrocki would like to see similar outreaches in Guatemala, Sudan, and Guyana, and Mexico. **"It seems impossible in the natural to think we could raise 7-8 international Life Clinics or a mobile clinic and a doctor to oversee each area in every continent but God is in the business of the supernatural, so nothing is impossible with God."**

For now, Dr. Nawrocki is busy serving 90 hour weeks caring for the "Hectors" who have nephews that need Jesus, and helping a small number of the over 41 million underinsured families in the US who still need medical care. With joy, he gives out free glasses and medicines to grateful patients. Donated McDonald toys and candy are favorites to the many children who throng around him when he sets up clinics. He averages 5 trips outside the states each year but would gladly do more if the funds were there. Whenever someone asks him why he is willing to do this, his simple response is, **"What I want to do is evangelize through medicine. If you hear me telling them about Jesus that's what I want to be "caught" doing more than medicine. I am a pastor/evangelist in disguise as a doctor. God has given me a nomadic heart so I love to travel. He also gave me the desire to learn and apply what I learn to His purposes."**