

Now You Can Get a Doctor Any Time



**What do you do when your family physician is away?
The emergency medical plan is providing the answer.**

by Howard Earle

"I'VE GOT TO GET a doctor. My wife is dying!" the distraught man screamed into the telephone.

At the Raleigh, N. C., telephone exchange, an operator connected the man with the local emergency medical call service. The service had a doctor at the man's home within an hour. His wife was whisked to the hospital, saving her life.

In Indianapolis, a busy mother heard a commotion and hurried into the living room to find her six-year-old son at the foot of the stairs, bleeding from the mouth and unconscious. She rushed to the telephone but couldn't reach the family doctor.

Frightened, she dialed the operator and explained her predicament. In an instant, a pleasant voice asked: "May I help you?" And within minutes the telephone answering service in Indianapolis had a doctor on his way.

All this is no happenstance. It's a well-developed plan, the result of intensive study by the American Medical Association and local medical societies which decided to remedy mounting complaints that doctors were not available in emergencies. Today there are more than 710 such emergency plans operating throughout the country, serving more than 91

million people. No city of more than 200,000 population is without the plan.

However, the size of a community has little to do with the plan's effectiveness. New York, Chicago, and Denver have efficient programs, but so do many smaller communities.

In Little Falls, N. Y., local physicians ran a newspaper announcement advising their patients what to do in an emergency: phone the hospital, which would know whether their doctor was available and, if not, what doctor was.

"Your physicians have made sure that medical care will always be available to you," said the announcement.

While emergency medical call plans vary according to the size of a community, they all have the same purpose—to guarantee that you can obtain a doctor any time of the day or night, any day of the year. The systems are so efficient that even in New York City, which operates the largest emergency plan in the country, it takes only seven or eight minutes to have a doctor on his way.

The plan embodies three elements: a group of physicians available for emergencies, an agency for contacting them, and publicity to inform citizens how to use the service.

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