



## WILLIAM DAVIS, M.D.

1924 - 2015

*by Jack Irvine, M.D.*

William Davis, born November 13, 1924, in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, died March 23, 2015, in Eureka. In April, 1943, Bill left college at age 19 and entered the army as a private first class. He served as a truck driver for three years in France, Germany, and Austria.

Upon his return home he resumed his college education in Fargo, North Dakota, with the intention of becoming a civil engineer. While he was in college he met Doris Matthew, his future wife, then a nursing student, who convinced him that he should pursue a medical career.

His medical school training was at the University of Nebraska, from which he graduated in 1952. Now married to Doris and with children, he finished an internship year in Kansas City and took a position at the Montana State Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Galen, Montana.

Back then a small salary, housing, and an allowance for food was provided by the state. In 1958, Bill and Doris decided that they wanted to live on the coast in California and, sight unseen, he accepted a position as staff physician at the Humboldt County Hospital, which was located on Harrison Avenue.

Housing for the two staff physicians and the hospital administrator was provided on hospital grounds. At that time the County Hospital was a busy place, with a large in-patient population, and his work required long hours and dedicated service.

On the hospital grounds employees raised pigs and milk cows, and trustees from the jail worked the large vegetable gardens, which provided food supplies for the patients and staff. In the early 1960s, Bill joined with Drs. Alan and George Watson in general practice, whose offices were in downtown Eureka.

Following the death and retirement of the Watsons, Bill found himself in solo practice and soon assumed the care of Max Goodman's patients following his retirement. This was a very demanding period in his career with long office hours, seven day work weeks, night call, home visits, and emergency calls, all requiring Bill's attention, which he provided diligently and professionally, with his characteristic cheerful, empathetic, and caring demeanor. Bill had a wonderful and calm disposition, despite the demands of any situation, which reassured patients and family alike.

In the late 1960s, Hal Braafladt joined him in practice for a number of years. Before his retirement in 1986 he also practiced with Jasper Davis and with Michael Burleson. After retirement, he worked part-time in a variety of situations in Eureka and Willow Creek.

Bill was one of the last of a generation of post-World War II general and family practitioners who formed the backbone of our medical community for several decades and whose dedication to his patients and to his profession was deep and abiding. He served as Chief of Staff at the General Hospital, as President of the Humboldt-Del Norte Medical Society,

and on many medical staff committees throughout his career. He understood the significance of the physician-patient relationship, its responsibility and importance in the art of medicine. He was a keen listener, a trait that helped to create the unique bonds that he had with his patients, who recognized his interest in them as well as in their medical problems. His kindness, compassion, and dedication created deep loyalty in his patients, typified in this poem written by one of those patients:

“Your step measures the corridor,/ In a moment your voice dries the air;/ A Minnesota clearing /Opens in the redwood mist. / Eyes trained on lakes and auroras /Perceive without fuss./ If you said, /“I notice an alien spacecraft /Down in the parking lot...”/ I’d reach for my instamatic /Before I looked around.” Bill also greatly appreciated the humor in this poem.

In retirement Bill and Doris traveled some, but most of his energy and time was centered around his children and grandchildren, to whom he was devoted. He loved tennis and continued to play until hip arthritis forced him to stop. He was a flight examiner and enjoyed flying, even taking lessons at one time, but never becoming a licensed pilot. He had a summer place in Willow Creek which became the family retreat and where Bill did most of the maintenance work himself. His children felt that he was pretty much capable of fixing any problem, whether mechanical, physical, or psychological.

During the course of Bill’s medical career there were profound changes in medical practice and medical care. Bill kept abreast of these advances in care yet never lost sight of the primacy of the patient and their well-being as the focal responsibility of the physician. We will miss Bill and his kind and gentle spirit.