



off call

## Rolf A. Zuleger, M.D.

1921 - 2007

By Bruce Kessler, M.D.



Rolf Zuleger was born in Germany and grew up in the tumultuous years between the two world wars. After graduating from college he enlisted as an officer in the German Navy to avoid being drafted in the army and spent the war years stationed in Bordeaux, France, where his wife says that he improved his fluency in French by speaking to French women. With the advance of the Allies at the end of the war his unit was called back to Berlin. As the Russians were approaching the city his commanding officer advised him to get out of his uniform and head west, away from the Russians. He followed this advice, and when he met up with a British unit, he attempted to surrender to them offering up his officer's pistol. He was told to keep his pistol, but they were happy to relieve him of his wristwatch. He always regretted losing the watch which was a graduation present from his parents. He was eventually able to surrender to another unit and due to his fluency in English, he spent the next year working as a translator for the British.

When the universities opened the next year he enrolled in medical school at the University of Hamburg, graduating *cum laude*. After an internship in Germany he was able to emigrate to the US under the sponsorship of his uncle who was a pastry chef in

San Francisco. He did another internship at Mary's Help Hospital followed by one year of pathology residency at St. Luke's Hospital. At a party he met a native Hawaiian nurse working at Peralta Hospital and he and Maupuana (affectionately known as Mopsy) were married later that year. His plan to become a pathologist was interrupted by another call to military duty, this time in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, where he and his wife had a chance to experience middle America at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Mopsy recalls that his stint in the Army gave him the chance to improve his English fluency by expanding his vocabulary of "blue language." As gentle a man as Rolf appeared in his later life, it seems ironic that he served time in both the German and the U.S. military.

He returned to San Francisco after he was discharged, and needed to seek employment to support his growing family. He joined a group practice and had a part time job as the doctor for the German Consulate in San Francisco. Because of his linguistic abilities, the consulate asked him to be part of a group that interviewed holocaust survivors seeking reparations from the German government. Mopsy says that he was deeply troubled to learn first hand of the atrocities committed by his beloved homeland and that he would have nightmares for the rest of his life remembering the horrible stories that he was told.

He decided that he and his family might be happier in a small town and learned that a general practice was for sale in Blue Lake after Dr. Scheppler died suddenly in an accident. In 1959 they moved to Blue Lake to a house attached to the medical office and he began his career as a small town general

practitioner. He saw patients in the office, did a little surgery, and delivered babies with office hours six days a week. He joined the staff of Trinity Hospital in Arcata where he and the other GP's did not share call, but did share hospital coverage. Each weekend they would take turns covering the hospital from 6 PM on Friday until 6 AM on Monday morning, seeing hospitalized patients and patients who came to the emergency room, delivering babies and generally doing whatever needed to be done. As was the custom at the time, GP's in town were on call 24/7 for their own patients, and only if they were going to be out of town did they ask someone else to cover for them. This was well before the day of pagers or cell phones.

Since the office was attached to their house, everyone in Blue Lake knew where to find the doctor after hours. This included the expected minor traumas such as fishing hooks in fingers, but what Mopsy remembers most was the time when a woman in labor arrived at their door in the middle of the night. Rolf answered the door to see what the commotion was and called Mopsy to come quickly to help with the delivery. The woman's amniotic sack burst, drenching Mopsy's nightgown, but they delivered a healthy baby there in the office.

In the 1960's a group from the growing community of McKinleyville asked Dr. Zuleger to move his practice, and for the rest of his career he practiced in McKinleyville. Mopsy is proud of the fact that they never turned away a patient because they were unable to pay. And this was before Medicare and MediCal and the more universal availability of employer sponsored medical insurance.

In the early 1970's when the Sisters of Orange closed the Trinity Hospital in Arcata and Alan Shaw built Mad River Hospital, the medical community in northern Humboldt County underwent a major change. Mad River Hospital recruited many medical specialists to practice at the new

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hospital and suddenly the older GP's were outnumbered by all of the new young doctors with their modern ideas of how medical care should be delivered. I was one of those young whippersnappers and I remember how graciously Dr. Zuleger welcomed us into their medical community. Even later when I as Chief of Staff had to remind Dr. Zuleger that if he did not complete his charts he would be have his admitting privileges suspended, (record keeping was never his forte) he always treated me with courtesy and respect.

In the 1980's, after his first bypass surgery, he retired from practice and spent his remaining years at home with his wife and family. He never tired of listening to his collection of classical music and was a regular at Leon Berliner's annual Christmas party where he would debate the merits of different recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. As his health declined he was cared for at home by his private duty nurse, Mopsy. He died just after New Years with his family at his bedside.

In our modern age of medicine where we share call, expect to be reimbursed to provide emergency room coverage, and a growing number of primary care physicians are giving up hospital care entirely, I feel that we can all learn something from Dr. Zuleger and the other physicians of his generation. They truly saw medicine as a calling and not just a job. We cannot and would

not want to bring back the "good old days." There is no question that the technical quality of the care that we can provide is light years ahead of that possible a mere half century ago. But I cannot help but admire their dedication to providing the best care that they could to their patients.

Dr. Zuleger is survived by his wife Maupuana, his sons Peter and John, his daughters Mary, Jamie and Louise, and his grandchildren. §

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## **"EMR"**

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I spoke with Clarice Alderdice to get an update on what St. Joseph Hospital is working on, and currently the health system is attempting to put together an interface that would allow information exchange between Meditech and certain ambulatory electronic medical records (including AllScripts, eClinicalWorks, and Practice Partners). This is just a pilot project, but the results could have significant benefits for their users for years to come. Apparently a lot of work is involved in creating these interfaces, and a unique interface must be created anew for each different EMR program. Wouldn't it be great to have lab values and ER visits automatically transferred into patient charts via email? That would save a lot of work.

As medical records change, we need to ask ourselves a number of questions. What form of record keeping is best for our patients? How can we maintain the confidentiality of those records? How expensive will the new systems be? With all the belt-tightening going on in medicine, will be able to afford these changes? Is it appropriate for the government to be involved in the transition from paper to computerized record keeping? Are electronic medical record inevitable, or will we end up also keeping paper charts, as has happened with electronic voting? §

1. Executive Order S-12-06, Office of the Governor
2. Letter to Herb Schultz, Chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Health Care dated 11/21/2006

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## **"Workforce"**

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Stone will head this team, and will look at other models in operation around the country. How would team structure differ in specialty teams vs. primary care teams?

The Research Committee on Quality and Best Practices will be headed by Betsy Stapleton. Using the IPA as a resource, this group will report on ways to select, monitor and update protocols, assess new services, and ensure accountability and quality in

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# **Humboldt Radiology Medical Group, Inc.**

would like to welcome  
***Dr. Donald Wheeler***

to our Practice of Diagnostic Radiology.