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## Current Medical-Moral Comment

THOMAS J. O'DONNELL, S.J.

This *Current Medical-Moral Comment* will be somewhat different from the usual. I am writing it in the little town of Hot Springs, in the mountains of western North Carolina. We are in the Pisgah National Forest, and there actually are hot springs in town, but this is not a resort. Our population is 720 — a tiny town beside the French Broad River and up the mountain sides, with an altitude of 1,300 feet at the river and 3,700 feet at the top of Rich Mountain immediately above.

I have come here, at my own request, to live among and serve these genuine, openhearted, wonderful mountain people. At the same time I will continue to write in the field of Medical Ethics and lecture to various groups around the country. Indeed this is part of the plan to support the mission.

Medical care is at an absolute minimum. There is one physician, elderly and retired, six miles back in the mountains along Spring Creek. A recent Foundation Survey of our vicinity showed 3,379 separate illnesses over a 12 month period, requiring 4,700 individual visits to physicians. A total of 44 per cent of these visits were made to Newport, Tennessee, 26 mountain miles away. Approximately 21 per cent went the 40 miles to Asheville or to other towns within a 30 mile radius. Marshall, North Carolina is only 26 miles across

the mountain — but in that 26 miles there are 178 sharp curves along steep mountains. The Foundation Survey showed that our people here, in the same 12 month period, collectively travelled 270,380 miles to seek medical care. Roughly they paid \$24,000 for medical care, \$18,000 for drugs and \$5,000 for gas and oil to get them. The nearest drug store is 25 miles away.

And yet right in town here we have a Physician's Clinic-Hospital with over 3,000 square feet of floor space. When it was completed about three years ago, it was licensed by the North Carolina Medical Care Commission. It is a modern, modern structure, with a surgical unit, a delivery room, a laboratory, x-ray facilities, three examining rooms, three private rooms, a five bed ward and a two bed children's ward — but no physician.

It is a place where a man could serve his fellow men who are in really serious medical need. He could make a good living, but we would hope that this would not be his motive for coming. And if he loved the mountain people, he could make a good life.

A station wagon would be better than a conventional car — with a sleeping bag and a Coleman stove and, of course, a rod and reel — because sometimes the people who need him most, and for whom his presence would mean the difference

between life and death, are further-  
est back in the mountains.

Young physicians, who are seeking a deeper fulfillment in the vocation of medicine, might think about places like this. A man could bring life, in the healing of his hands, to these mountains. Because we have

no doctor, too often, we have another grave on the hill above Spring Creek.

This column appears simultaneously in the *Georgetown Medical Bulletin*. Father O'Donnell's address is P. O. Box 7, Hot Springs, No. Car. 28743.

The General Assembly of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds will be held Friday afternoon, December 9, 1966, at the Shamrock-Hilton Hotel, Houston, Texas. Time: 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. Election of Officers during this business session. All Guild members should be present.