

A Different Sort of House Call

Category: House Calls and Home Care

written by Dana Cook Grossman | December 14, 2025

When most people hear the term “house call,” I’m sure the picture in their mind is of a black-bag-toting physician tending to a patient in the patient’s own home.

But when I hear the term “house call,” the picture in my mind is of a time, 49 years ago, when my family physician tended to me at *his* home.

Here’s how that divergence from the usual house-call M.O. came to pass:

In the summer of 1976, I was nine months pregnant with our first daughter—though my husband and I didn’t yet know we were having a girl, this being well before gender reveals were routine. Late on a Saturday night in mid-July, I began having regular but light contractions. We called our family practice’s answering service, and our doctor called back, asked a few questions, and told us to check in with him overnight if my contractions intensified or became more frequent—or in the morning if there was no significant change before then.

Things were still the same when the sun rose, so we called the answering service to report that fact. This time, when our doctor called back, he said he’d like to examine me to check my cervical effacement and other markers of the progression of labor.

It is of note that we live in a rural area, where one is far more likely than in a suburb or a big city to be neighbors or even friends with one’s doctor (or plumber or lawyer or mechanic)—and as a result, one’s business and professional interactions tend to be a bit more informal than is the case in more urbanized areas, and that was especially so back then.

It happened that we lived about 15 miles north of our doctor’s office, and he lived about five miles north of the office. And given that this was a Sunday morning, he was at home, not in his office. So if we met for the examination at his office, that would have meant a 30-mile round trip for us and a 10-mile round trip for him. But if we met at his house, that meant my husband and I would have only a 20-mile round trip and our doctor wouldn’t even need to leave home.

To make a long story short (and a long drive shorter), our doctor asked us to meet him at his house—where he laid a bath towel on the bed in his and his wife’s bedroom and had me lie down on it so he could check the status of my labor.

Then my husband and I, and our doctor and his wife, sat and enjoyed coffee and pastries for half an hour or so—before my husband and I drove back home to let my labor continue to progress.

Finally, late Sunday night, the pace of my contractions called for making our

way to the hospital, and our daughter arrived at 1:52 a.m. on Monday. I've always been grateful that her entry into the world was eased by a sensible and humane, albeit highly unusual, twist on one of medicine's storied conventions.

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