

SAMUEL P. BURRE, M.D.
Recipient of 1989 Plessner Memorial Award

Samuel P. Burre, M.D., a physician who started his family practice in his home town of Eureka in 1930 and who has continued to serve his patients without pause ever since, is the Frederick K.M. Plessner Memorial Award winner for 1989.

The year 1930 was not - and there are few physicians still practicing who have had first-hand experience - "a very fine year." The Great depression had started a few months before, although no one then recognized the fact, and young physicians setting out in practice did so without a great deal of economic hope. Dr. Sam, as most Eureka call him, started as a part-time physician at the Humboldt County Hospital- without wages- as he struggled to open his practice to the few folks around who could afford to pay.

Dr. Burre graduated from Loyola School of Medicine in Chicago, served his internship at St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco, and returned to his long time home, Eureka. He first arrived there when he was two, his parents having moved out West from Chicago.

Two incidents from those dire depression days reflect Dr. Sam's dedication to rural medicine and serve as an excellent base for his nomination for the Plessner Award:

Like most physicians in the 1930's, Dr. Burre made hundreds of house calls during the course of his family practice, but in 1933, three years into it, he made one of the most heroic house calls recorded in California medical history. The famed blizzard of 1933 dropped four feet of snow in the hills back of Eureka the same day a rancher who lived some 20 miles back accidentally shot himself in the leg and shattered his femur. The Chief Surgeon assigned the rescue mission to Dr.

Sam. Two days later, after some very unpleasant horseback trekking, Dr. Sam and his guide reached the rancher, improvised a sled out of fence posts and corrugated iron and pulled him out to safety, where the leg was set and the man recovered.

The second incident is recorded only by a photographer in the local paper, showing Dr. Sam with payment in full from a patient, consisting of one medium-sized pig.

That was then. Today, Dr. Sam's practice continues. He sees about 40 patients each day in his office- half of them Medi-Cal- and watches over some 50 others in convalescent homes. He says he won't retire until there is no longer need of his services. There are no signs of that time growing close.

When Mr. Plessner endowed this award, he requested that, when the recipient is chosen, consideration be given to services donated by the physician to the indigent. Dr. Burre is dedicated to serving the needy of his community. He is one of the very few physicians- if not the only one- in Eureka who still accepts new Medi-Cal patients.

But he is also well-known for his artistic talents. His works are on display at local hospitals and in other public buildings in Eureka. He has written more than a hundred editorial pieces for the press as well as many letters to the editor. His other publications go all the way from poetry through personal recollections, history and travel to scientific reporting in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Dr. Burre has coupled his medical practice and involvement in improving his fellow citizens' life styles. He served as chief fund raiser for St. Joseph's Hospital when it was undergoing major renovation in the 1950's, making a major personal donation

himself, was a member of the Eureka parking Commission and, in 1980, was Chairman of the Board of Directors, Eureka General Hospital.

In 1940, he served as president of the Humboldt-Del Norte County Medical Society and , in 1949, was president of the Eureka Old Town Merchant's Association.

Dr. Samuel P. Burre has been one of Eureka's most outstanding citizens for nearly 90 years. He has been one of California's outstanding rural physicians for nearly 60 years. And he is a most deserving recipient of the Frederick K. M. Plessner Memorial Award for 1989.