

MACM Insured Makes House Call in Pursuit of Writing

MACM insured Darden North, M.D. now empathizes with his OB patients who can't sleep in anticipation of a new arrival. Prior to the release of his first novel, *House Call*, in October 2005, he didn't sleep a wink.

House Call, a medical thriller, with colorful characters and plot twists involving suspicious murders, a bumbling police investigation and corporate financial greed, was written and released by Dr. North, an obstetrician/gynecologist practicing in partnership with Jackson Healthcare for Women, PA.

The storyline is pure fiction, but it is a story that he has had in his head for some time. "I've talked about writing a novel for years before I actually started and then discussed the possibility for several more years," Dr. North said.

Over 10 years ago, Dr. North began writing *House Call*. The son of an English teacher, he always had a strong interest in the written word. Collecting first edition printings of works by Mississippi authors sparked the desire to write a book. "I decided that if lawyers and musicians could write a book, I could do it too," he said.

Not that he knew exactly where to begin; his first step was trying to figure out the actual mechanics of writing. "I didn't know if I should type or dictate or write it long-hand. I didn't know whether to start with the story or the characters. I just did it." Dr. North said. He started by typing a couple of chapters and began the process of putting words on paper.

Over the next several years, he would come back to the book every so often — type a few more words and add a few more characters — but never made a full commitment to the project. Then, three years ago, he decided to finish it. He returned to his desk, with improved typing and computer skills, and made a conscious effort to finish a story that had been on his mind for a while.

"I just decided that I was going to finish it," Dr. North said. "Once it was close to finish and I could see the ending, I realized that I had something I liked. Then I began the research on how to get it published."

One of the most interesting things for Dr. North in the writing process was the challenge of merging the plot and storyline with the characters. In his mind, he had vivid ideas of how each character was to look, act and live. He watched people and observed their mannerisms whenever he had the opportunity and incorporated clothing, habits and personalities into the characters he created.

"Character development is one of my favorite aspects of the writing process. I wanted the reader to know each character as an individual," Dr. North said. "I developed certain characters in my mind that I knew I wanted to write about. The challenge then became how to include them in the story-telling process."

While extremely supportive, many of Dr. North's closest friends and family had one re-occurring concern. "None of the characters in the book are based on real people," Dr. North said with a laugh. "That's a regular question I'm asked."

Another part of the process that was important to Dr. North was writing a fictional story so well that people would believe it could happen and be true. "It was challenging to tie everything together at the end," he said.



Darden H. North, M.D.

One challenge for Dr. North each day as he sat down to write was not writing too much with too many words. As a physician, Dr. North was educated for many years to over explain procedures and diagnoses to his patients. As part of good risk management, he has always tried to communicate well and thoroughly with his patients. But, writing a murder mystery required a different thought process entirely.

"I had to learn not to tell the reader too much," Dr. North said. "Part of the joy of reading is figuring out where the author is going and what the author is trying to say. It was hard to learn that I needed to leave something for the reader's imagination."

Throughout the process, Dr. North asked as many different people as he could to read the manuscript. Fellow physicians, nurses, lawyers, friends, and family all read and provided genuine feedback. "Everyone had a good point to make," Dr. North said. "Everyone had a different perspective. Some wanted to

know more about the characters. Some wanted to know more about the medicine. It was a constantly changing piece of work for a while."

Now that the finished work has been out for a few months, how has it been received? According to Dr. North, who self published his work, the book is exceeding his hopeful expectations. "*House Call* took off much faster than we hoped. It has been so well received so quickly," Dr. North said. "The reception that I've received has been very encouraging and much appreciated."

Locally-owned bookstores were the first really good avenue for getting the book

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into people's hands. Soon after, several national book stores were calling wanting copies for their shelves.

“My patients have been genuinely excited. People are fascinated by anyone in their life that does something different. This was a great opportunity to do something different and still get to do what I love – practice medicine,” Dr. North said. “The partners at Jackson Healthcare for Women have been extra supportive as well. It was extremely important to me that my practice level not slow down and I’ve purposely made every effort to not let this experience affect my practice.”

Writing at night and in every spare moment has become routine for Dr. North as he continues work now on his second book. “My children are older and are not as *hands on* as they once were,” Dr. North said. “These days, I go to my laptop instead of the television or hunting. I use all my spare time to write. My goal is to write something every single day. If you do that, than eventually, you have a 300-plus page book.”

He is planning for the release of his second book in the late fall of this year. This book is set in the same area of Mississippi as *House Call*, but in a neighboring town, Larkspur. There are references between the two books, but each book is separate from the other. “I’m not interested in writing a series. I want each book to have a beginning and an ending.”

Dr. North has no plans to leave his practice to pursue a full-time writing career. “The first book took me 10 years to write. I’m not going anywhere anytime soon.”