

# From testicles to Timbuktu: notes from a family doctor

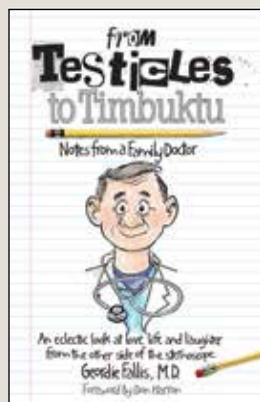
An eclectic look at love, life and laughter from the other side of the stethoscope

**AUTHOR** Geordie Fallis

**PUBLISHER** Flawlis Publishing

**WEBSITE** [www.notesfromadoc.com](http://www.notesfromadoc.com)

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**OVERALL RATING** Very good  
**STRENGTHS** Compassionate storytelling  
**WEAKNESSES** Not a scholarly book, but scholars would do well to read it  
**AUDIENCE** Family physicians, residents, and students who like to laugh

This book is a remarkable collection of stories and anecdotes from the life of a Canadian family doctor over the past 40 years. Geordie Fallis' honest and humorous tales reveal his sensitivity and attentiveness to his patients and his ability to share, with them and with us, the "bellyful of laughter" that is often the best medicine of all.

Dr Fallis has kept a journal since his first days as a medical student. The stories he recounts, such as the first birth he attended (which moved him so profoundly that he vowed to include obstetrics in his practice) and his reactions to his first physical examination of a woman's chest, vividly express a young doctor's naïveté and sense of wonder.

The characters he encounters in his early days in practice—not all of them human—continue his schooling. In the small town of Bella Coola, BC, with the

nearest veterinarian almost 500 km away, community members sometimes turned to their doctors for assistance with their animals. On one occasion, a cat who had just delivered a litter of kittens was brought in. Her uterus appeared to be prolapsed. After a phone consultation with the veterinarian, Dr Fallis replaced the uterus and put a suture around the vagina to prevent the uterus dropping out again. The next day the cat's owner called with an update. Her cat had appeared distressed, so she cut the suture, and out popped the final kitten of the litter. "Move Over, James Herriot" is the tongue-in-cheek title for this section of stories about Dr Fallis' enthusiastic and sometimes inept attempts to help the local veterinary patients.

But it is in his observations about his human patients where Dr Fallis' empathy and insights shine. From Bella Coola and then Baie Verte, Nfld, he moved on to practise in Toronto, Ont, where he is currently the Chief of the Department of Family Practice at the Toronto East General Hospital. One cannot help but be moved by the stories of his patients, such as Steve, who has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and communicates by Morse code, tapped out on a contraption between his knees; his minimal movements are translated by a computer into language. Steve is tube fed, and on an occasional evening visit to Steve's hospital room, Dr Fallis brings 2 bottles of beer along, offering "a Stella for a fella." Steve has become a critic and editor of the jokes and stories offered in this collection.

And what does the title *From Testicles to Timbuktu* mean? You will need to finish the book to catch the 2 stories at the end that provide the explanation. Warning: both of these jokes are slightly racy! Dr Fallis reads his stories aloud in the audiobook version (available from the same publisher), and that works well—these are anecdotes meant to be told and retold. The stories are available in a print edition this month. Full disclosure: we are fortunate to have been practice partners with Geordie Fallis. More important, we like to laugh. If you do, too, you will enjoy the graceful stories of this "wonderful" (in the Newfoundland sense of the word) family physician. 🍁

—Ruth Wilson MD CCFP FCFP

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