

LA DOCTORCITA

Introduction

The sky was bright with sunshine, but it was a bitterly cold February morning as I entered the snug and warm adobe home of Mrs. Salazar and approached our patient.

“¿Tiene dolor?” I murmured softly.

“No,” said Mrs. Abeyta.

Thinking I might have said the words wrong, I placed my hand on her very pregnant abdomen and, looking straight at her, repeated in a slightly louder voice:

“¿Tiene dolor?”

“No,” she said.

Having exhausted my entire Spanish vocabulary, I said goodbye and departed.

It was my third day on duty as assistant physician to Dr. Sarah Bowen at Brooklyn Cottage Hospital, a Presbyterian mission hospital in Dixon, New Mexico. I had been sent to find out if the maternity patient Dr. Bowen had brought down from Chacon Clinic the day before was in labor. Obviously she was not. ¿Tiene dolor? Do you have pain? How many hundreds of times would I ask that question in the months to come?