

Pediatrician Babich helped form one of area's first HMOs

BY CATHY LOCKE
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Sacramento physician John Babich accepted patients regardless of their ability to pay, his family members said, while also working to rein in medical costs by helping to establish one of the area's first managed health care programs.

Babich, a pediatrician who treated three generations of children, died Sept. 4 in Sacramento at age 90. He was afflicted with cardiac disease and other ailments, said Marie Babich, his wife.

A native of Sacramento, Babich practiced in his hometown for 37 years. "He loved children, and their parents, too," said Marie Babich, also a physician, who met her husband of 65 years at Sacramento County Hospital, now UC Davis Medical Center, where both interned.

"He was charming, good looking and a good doctor," she said.

Babich's son, John Babich, said his father took care of whoever came to his office. "He didn't look at people's insurance, or whether or not they were able to pay," he recalled.

If he knew a family was struggling financially, he would write off what they owed at the end of the year, said his son, adding that his father treated the children of clergy members for free and discounted fees for teachers.

But, John Babich said, "He understood the spiraling cost of medicine in America, and he saw that it was not sustainable."



John Babich

Program, and the Professional Standards and Review Organization. The programs

were designed to provide peer review and to set standards for hospital care to ensure that people weren't hospitalized longer than they needed to be, said Marie Babich.

Charles French, a long-time friend and colleague, said he and Babich were involved in establishing a foundation devoted to more effective and economical medical care. That led to a managed health care plan that originally was part of state-sponsored Medi-Cal. Eventually, French said, it became the Foundation Health Plan, one of the area's first health maintenance organizations. French said he and Babich were members of the HMO's board of directors.

Babich, who served as president of the Sacramento Medical Society in 1970, was also noted for his involvement in campaigns to improve public health and safety. He was instrumental in getting cigarette machines removed from area hospitals, and he was an early advocate of bicycle lanes on Sacramento streets. In the 1960s, John Babich said, his father and fellow physicians bicycled down K Street wearing white coats and stethoscopes to lobby for bike lanes.

Babich also served two short-term medical missions in Chichicastenango,

a Guatemalan village that lacked medical care providers. French said Babich recruited physicians to join ongoing efforts to serve the village.

Babich was born Oct. 14, 1924, to Joseph and Helen Babich, who had immigrated to Sacramento from Croatia. He grew up in Sacramento's midtown area and went to Christian Brothers High School. He attended St. Mary's College in Moraga and received his medical degree from St. Louis University School of Medicine. After interning at Sacramento County Hospital, he returned to St. Louis for his residency in pediatrics.

John Babich said his father volunteered for service in the Army during World War II but was rejected because he was colorblind. After he completed his medical training, however, he was drafted and served as chief of pediatrics at the 2nd Field Hospital in Munich, Germany, from 1954 through 1956.

Babich was a delegate to the California Medical Association for several years and was an assistant clinical professor of pediatrics at UC Davis Medical School.

After retiring, Babich enjoyed traveling and playing golf. French, who served as Babich's physician during the last decade of his life, described his friend as "witty, humorous and always very helpful." Babich advised French, a general practitioner, on pediatrics during the early years of his practice, French recalled, and offered tips on how to improve his golf game.

Babich's patients never forgot him.

"We would be out shopping some place like Corti Brothers and invariably someone would say, 'Dr. Babich, Dr. Babich,' and it would be someone he

took care of 30 years ago," recalled his son.

Babich was preceded in death by his brother, Sacramento Superior Court Judge Joseph G. Babich, and an infant grandson. In addition to his wife, he is survived by son John F.

Babich of Char daughters Marie Jennie Babich; Babich, all of S. and Judy Babich orado Springs, three grandchildren. A memorial is held at 10 a.

St. Ignatius Church, 3235 Arden Way. Memorial gifts may be sent to Loaves & Fishes, Christian Brothers High School or a favorite charity.

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Babich of Charlotte, N.C.; daughters Marie Babich, Jennie Babich and Maggie Babich, all of Sacramento, and Judy Babich of Colorado Springs, Colo.; and three grandchildren. A memorial mass will be held at 10 a.m. today at

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In some cases, he said, his father took on physicians themselves. "Now, cost control is all done by people in three-piece suits with MBAs," John Babich said. "This was when doctors still ran the show."

In collaboration with Dr. James Bramham and Dr. Jim Schubert, Babich helped establish the Certified Hospital Admission