Barry Laverty, MD, can barely find the village of Ballybucklebo on a map when he first sets out to seek gainful employment there, but already he knows that there is nowhere he would rather live than in the emerald hills and glens of Northern Ireland. The proud owner of a spanking-new medical degree, Barry jumps at the chance to secure a position as an assistant in a small rural practice. At least until he meets Dr. Fingal Flahertie O'Reilly. The older physician, whose motto is never let the patients get the upper hand, has his own way of doing things, which definitely takes some getting used to. At first, Barry can't decide if the pugnacious O'Reilly is the biggest charlatan he has ever met, or possibly the best teacher he could ever hope for. Ballybucklebo is a long way from Belfast, and Barry soon discovers that he still has a lot to learn about country life. But if he sticks with it, he just might end up finding out more about life and love than he could ever have imagined back in medical school.
The author Patrick Taylor now lives on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. Taylor is a distinguished medical research worker, off-shore sailor, model boat-builder and seannachie.

Born in 1941, Taylor was brought up in Bangor, Northern Ireland, and received his medical education in Ulster. He initially practiced in a rural Ulster village akin to Ballybucklebo before taking specialist training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. After living in Belfast through the first two years of the recent Irish Troubles (1969-1994) he and his family emigrated to Canada where he pursued a career in medical research and teaching in the field of human infertility. His contributions have been honoured with three lifetime achievement awards including the Lifetime Award of Excellence of the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society.

A talent for the written word, first recognized when he was 16 by his winning the “Campbellian Prize for Literature”, led to an outpouring of contributions to the medical literature. His scientific works include 170 papers and six textbooks, one translated from the original French. For ten years, (1991-2001) he was editor-in-chief of the Canadian Obstetrics and Gynaecology journal.

To add leavening to dry, academic prose Taylor has always nurtured his creative side. His monthly medical humour columns which began in 1991, En Passant, Medicine Chest and Taylor’s Twist were followed by his appointment as book reviewer to Stitches: The Journal of Medical Humour.

In the mid-nineties, encouraged by his long time friend Jack Whyte, author of the

An expert navigator, Taylor has been a member of off-shore racing crews. His race reports, including his account of a recent Victoria to Maui challenge complement his frequent contributions of sailing humour to boating magazines.

Two of his models, Rattlesnake a three-masted frigate and the schooner Bluenose are on display in the local pub on Bowen Island, a small island off Vancouver.
Discussion Questions

Spoiler Alert: these questions reveal much of the novel’s plot; to preserve your reading pleasure, please don’t look at these questions until after you’ve finished reading the book.

1. Just a few pages into *An Irish Country Doctor*, its main character, Barry Laverty, speaks of his love for and devotion to Northern Ireland. What do we learn about the soul of the country, by the story’s end? What makes it such a compelling home for Barry, and for Taylor’s other characters?

2. Barry’s first encounter with Dr. Fingal Flahertie O’Reilly is surprising, to say the least. What is your initial reaction to O’Reilly? Does your opinion of him change along with Barry’s as the book progresses?

3. By many standards, Dr. O’Reilly’s medical practice is often unorthodox. Is he an effective physician? Is he a moral one? Have you ever known a doctor who resembled him? Would you trust O’Reilly with your own medical care?

4. There are several instances throughout the book in which O’Reilly breaches traditional ethics—in maintaining confidentiality, in telling patients the truth, even in prescribing “tonics”—while caring for his patients. How does Barry react to this? How do those breaches make you feel? Are there ever medical situations like these in which you think the end justifies the means?

5. *An Irish Country Doctor* portrays two people who each lost their partner long ago, and who have now platonically shared a home and a life for decades. What do you think makes O’Reilly and Kinky such good colleagues in the running of his practice and his day-to-day life? How do they play off one another’s temperament? At any point in the story, did you wonder why they had never fallen in love with one another? Why has each remained single for so long?

6. Barry’s first meeting with Patricia seems to have a quality about it of “love at first sight,” of his being smitten by her beauty and she by his slightly awkward charm. Is there more to their attraction than that? Do you think that “love at first sight” can form the basis of an enduring relationship?