Some officials in Washington have attributed their inaction to gaps in the law and in the regulations under which they work, and a shortage of specific Federal standards is occasionally apparent.

But critics in Congress and elsewhere have blamed bureaucratic inertia and timidity for the failure to regulate drug and plasma operations, and a lapse in enforcement is also occasionally apparent.

For example, the Food and Drug Administration employs only a single physician to conduct field investigations of all the studies underway in the United States, and the Agency's inquiries rarely go behind the dry scientific data.

METHODS CALLED DANGEROUS

The Division of Biologics Standards, a unit of the National Institutes of Health that is responsible for the regulation of blood products, recently asserted that the safety of plasma donors was not its concern.

Several major pharmaceutical manufacturers have recognized that some of the methods employed by Dr. Stough were extremely dangerous. They continued to support him with large sums of money.

An executive of Cutter Laboratories once acknowledged, for instance, that gross contamination was apparent in the areas where the largest blood plasma operations were conducted. The rooms were "sloppy," he observed.

When a Government doctor asked why Cutter continued to reward such an enterprise with hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of business, the executive explained that the Stough group enjoyed crucial "contacts" with well-placed officials.

FEES AND PARTNERS

These contacts involved, among other things, the payment of sizable retainers to influential lawyer-legislators and the establishment of "partnerships" for a number of prison physicians who remained on the public payrolls.

With neither Government nor industry intruding, with most of their records held in secret, with officials passing the problem on to someone else, Dr. Stough prospered at his work throughout the nineteen-sixties.

He has generally declined to talk with local newspapermen about the controversies involving him. And he recently refused to grant an interview with a reporter for The Times.

"We've taken the position of no comment," Dr. Stough said during a recent telephone conversation with a reporter who had asked to see him. "I don't think we're interested in airing anything in the newspaper."

"We think some people have made a mistake," he remarked, referring to the medical observers, editorial writers and state officials who have assailed him. But, he added, "I'm not looking for revenge on anybody."

Efforts to photograph Dr. Stough were unsuccessful, and an extensive search of newspaper files and other sources turned up the pictures of the physician.

STARTED IN OKLAHOMA

Dr. Stough graduated from the University of Tennessee Medical College, spent a one-year internship in Oklahoma City, and opened a private practice in McAlester, site of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, late in 1937.

He soon began to serve, on a part-time basis, as the prison physician. With direct access to more than 2,000 inmates, his drug tests began to grow extensively. In the meantime, he started a new endeavor.

On March 25, 1962, the inmates at McAlester began lining up to participate in a medical procedure called plasma-pheresis. Under it, a unit of whole blood is drawn and the plasma, a fluid that makes up about 55 per cent of the blood, is taken out.

The remaining cells are reinjected. That was the critical step on Sept. 19, 1962, when one of Dr. Stough's technicians processed an inmate named Tommy Lee Knott, 47, an illiterate prisoner with a long criminal record.

Knott's blood type was O-positive, but he subsequently charged in a lawsuit that after the plasma had been drawn off, the technician pumped another man's cells, which happened to A-negative back into his veins.

ORGANS DIAGNOSED

Unfortunately for Knott, his liver, lungs, brain, kidneys and other organs were injured, his nervous system underwent shock, and his weight dropped 58 pounds in 17 days.