



**John Hickner, MD, MSc**  
Editor-in-Chief

# 4 reasons to be optimistic about family medicine

I just returned from the Association of Departments of Family Medicine Winter meeting in San Diego. Despite the tight financial times many departments are experiencing, an air of optimism permeated the meeting. One Chair commented, "I don't know about you, but this is the most exciting time I have ever had in my 35 years as a family physician."

You may be asking yourself how he could say this when FPs are struggling to keep up with conversions to electronic medical records, "meaningful" use, the specter of the ICD-10 implementation, and other increasing government and insurance company requirements. Because I share his excitement, I'll give you my 4 reasons for optimism in our specialty.

**1. Family medicine has been discovered.** We no longer take a back seat in the health care system. In fact, one Chair said, "It is our turn to drive the bus." Insurers, large health care organizations, and our patients expect us to drive health care out of its current state of confusion and bloated costs into local and regional integrated systems that improve care and decrease costs. Dr. Chelley Alexander, Family Medicine Department Chair, University of Alabama College of Community Health Sciences in Tuscaloosa, led a terrific project in his state that engaged community health workers, social workers, primary care physicians, and hospitals in a collaboration targeting high-utilization patients. The project dramatically reduced hospital admissions and

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ED visits and improved patients' health care outcomes. This is one of many projects around the country led by FPs that have improved health care and decreased costs.

**2. We have an opportunity to fill the gaps in physician manpower** as general internists become hospitalists and specialists become subspecialists. For this reason, it is crucial for FPs to train and maintain skills in a broad scope of practice.

**3. Applications to family medicine residencies are increasing<sup>1</sup>** and the candidates are strong. This recruitment season, I had the opportunity to interview applicants to our program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Judging by the quality of the candidates, I am not sure I would have been successful in landing a spot!

**4. FPs are in demand in the marketplace.** Just look at the want ads for FPs in the various family medicine journals, including this one. Take your pick in an area of the country and look at the rising starting salaries.

To be sure, life is not easy as a family doc; but it never has been. We are FPs because the rewards outweigh the hassles (on most days). The health care system and our patients want more of us, and now we are seeing signs that the system is willing to pay more for us, too.

1. Family medicine match rate increases slightly again in 2013. American Academy of Family Physicians Web site. Available at: <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/education-professional-development/20130315matchresults.html>. Accessed February 18, 2014.

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