

Expanded Literature Base as a Critical Need in Family Practice

Family Practice as a field has a strong tradition of service through patient care, but a weak tradition for literature. There are many reasons for this — until recently family physicians have been singularly absent in medical schools, they have frequently been deluged with clinical responsibilities at the expense of contributing to the literature, academic medicine has focused predominantly on tertiary care and biomedical research, and there have been inadequate tools for research in primary care.

There are many gaps in our existing literature. For example, we know very little about the family as a unit of care, about the natural history of common primary care problems, about the cost-effectiveness of specific health maintenance approaches, or how best to integrate the principles of behavioral science in the care of individuals and their families. The literature has generally been more disease-oriented than problem-oriented. The clinical and decision-making process of the family physician has received inadequate attention. Few articles are derived from the family physician's particular perspective.

The rapid emergence of Family Practice in the last several years has naturally involved a strong element of rhetoric. Our task now is to move beyond that phase to the harder job of formalizing a new body of litera-



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ture of excellence. As Family Practice now assumes its rightful place in both undergraduate and graduate medical education, we must better define the specialty as a clinical discipline. This specialty has taken birth from General Practice, and has broadened its content and concern to meet the needs for more comprehensive care of families. The academic discipline of Family Medicine must be articulated together with the relationship of the specialty to other clinical disciplines and new methods of delivery of health care.

The Journal of Family Practice is conceived as a scholarly publication which will take an honest and unbiased approach in developing an expanded literature base for this specialty. *The Journal* will supple-

ment existing literature in the field and will be addressed to three major objectives:

1. Creating a forum to stimulate the development of a firm literature base for all aspects of Family Practice.
2. Building the framework of Family Medicine as the academic discipline of this new specialty.
3. Synthesizing clinical, educational and research aspects of Family Practice for family physicians, family practice residents, medical students and others interested in this developing specialty.

The Journal of Family Practice will attempt to meet these objectives by encouraging contributions of outstanding quality from family physicians, those in training for Family Practice and others in related disciplines who are interested in this developing specialty. The quality of literature in Family Practice is a vital element in the capability of this specialty to reach its potential as a major force in primary care, in the necessary definition of Family Medicine as an academic discipline, and in our continued success in attracting medical students to careers in Family Practice.

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