

# Toward a Body of Literature in Family Medicine



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Even the casual observer of American medical education over the past decade must be aware by now that significant change has occurred — a rapid evolution if not revolution. Increased enrollments, shortened curricula, coordinated systematic curricula, increased time and variety for electives, extension into the practice community, emphasis on objectives and evaluation and increased admission of minority and female students all testify to the breadth and depth of the change.

Among the most important and potentially far-reaching changes is the recovery and reconstitution of the generalist role as a legitimate professional vocation. Organized mainly under the rubric of Family Medicine, students are increasingly opting for this role and seeking both undergraduates of early family practice high quality. The impact of choice has been to expose the poverty of medical school faculties in their ability to meet these needs.

Medical schools and teaching hospitals have squeezed and scraped to find teachers, and amazingly enough, some are being found. General practitioners, retreat specialists, graduates of early family practice residencies, friendly consultants and non-M.D. co-professionals have come together to take on the challenge of learning to teach what they have not themselves been taught. These teachers are now constituting academic divisions and departments and are beginning to define their tasks and to ask questions of themselves. They are beginning to initiate research and to produce papers. The day has passed when one can get a large academic forum to exhort or pontificate on "Why I am a Family Doctor." Now there are studies on morbidity in practice, epidemiology, demography, medical records, taxonomy, behavioral science in clinical practice, the health care team and other subjects of substance that require a hearing.

It is for this reason that the appearance of *The Journal of Family Practice* is so critically appropriate. There

is a pressing need for teachers of Family Medicine to be able to communicate with each other about their professional work. There is also the need for a refereed journal in which quality papers can appear as a demonstration of professional competence.

These needs do not begin to be met by journals which emphasize review articles or newspaper type coverage of medical meetings. There is



**Dr. Gayle Stephens**

currently no other journal available to the family physician-teacher for professional contributions. I think I can speak for all family practice faculty in warmly welcoming *The Journal of Family Practice* as a necessary accoutrement to the academic discipline of Family Medicine. A body of literature must be developed if the discipline is to negotiate successfully the adolescent "growing pains" to become a mature and established branch of medical knowledge.

On behalf of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine, we wish *The Journal* a long and productive existence.

G. Gayle Stephens, M.D.

President, Society of Teachers  
of Family Medicine