

The Journal of Family Practice: 1974-1979

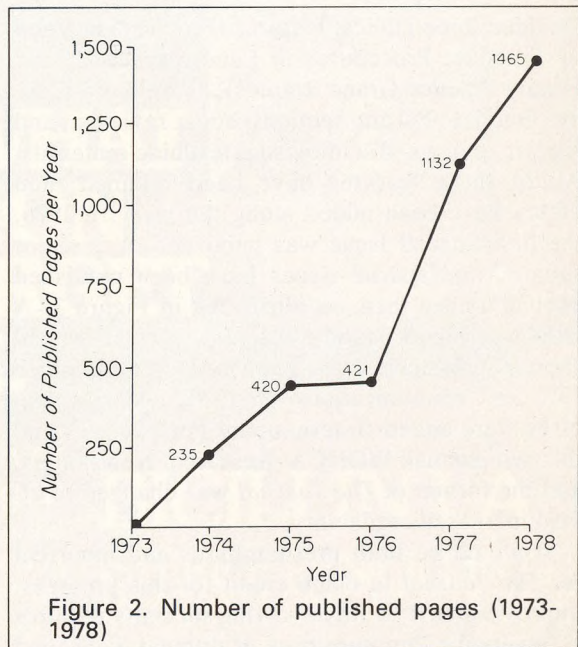
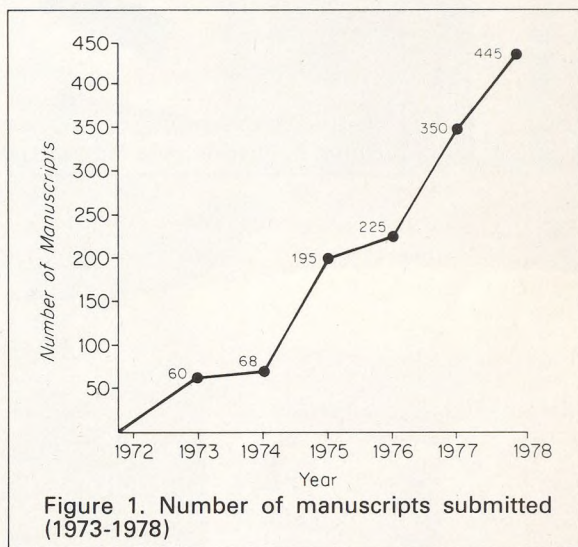
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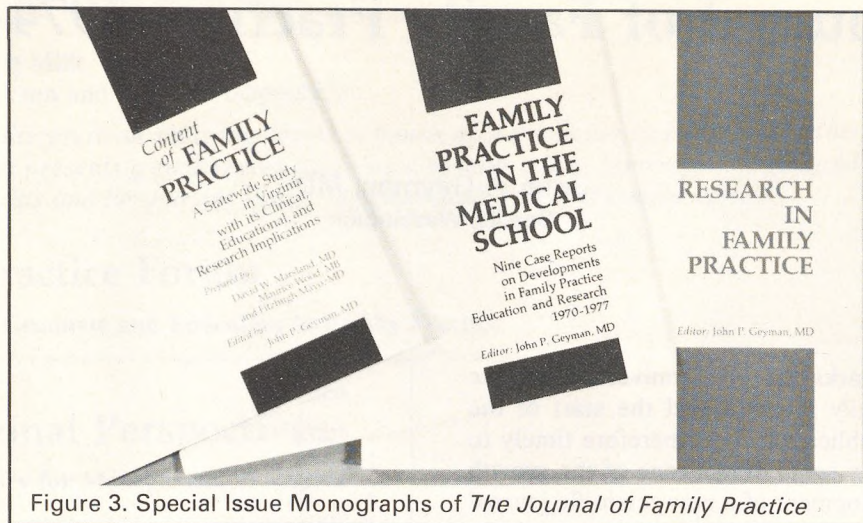
This issue marks the fifth anniversary of *The Journal of Family Practice* and the start of the sixth year of publication. It is therefore timely to reflect briefly on some dimensions of the growth and initial development of a new scientific journal in a new specialty, each of which bears many resemblances to a living organism.

The most striking feature of the first five years of publication is growth. Starting as a quarterly journal in 1974, *The Journal* became bimonthly in 1975, and has been published monthly since January 1977. The volume of submitted manuscripts has increased exponentially (Figure 1), and almost all of these have been spontaneously submitted. The number of published pages has likewise increased exponentially as shown in Figure 2.

More important than physical growth is the quality of this growth. There are several objective measures marking the high level of quality of *The Journal*, as well as anecdotal evidence that the quality of published work continues to increase. *The Journal* was promptly approved by *Index Medicus* after publication of just three issues, and has become the most frequently cited journal in the world literature for the specialty. Starting in January 1978, *Index Medicus* listed *family practice* for the first time as a separate listing (previously all related listings were included rather sparsely under the heading of *general practice*). A stable group of distinguished reviewers in family practice and many other disciplines has maintained interest in and dedication to the critical process of peer review. In addition, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that *The Journal* is being read increasingly widely in other fields and by leaders and health planners in government.

It is also of interest to summarize some of the changes of content and format which have taken place over the past five years. The early issues





included three clinical features (Problems in Family Practice, Procedures in Family Practice, and Family Practice Grand Rounds), as well as a Family Practice Forum section, book reviews, and regular reviews of audiovisual teaching materials. All of these features have been retained, and others have been added along the way. In 1976, the first Special Issue was published on a major subject, and special issues have been published annually since then, as illustrated in Figure 3. A Self-Assessment feature was started in 1976, and short papers have been published monthly since 1977 as Communications. In 1978, two new features were added (International Perspectives and the semiannual WONCA Research Newsletter), and the format of *The Journal* was changed to afford increased readability.

It would be both presumptuous and incorrect for *The Journal* to claim credit for this progress, impressive as it is. Any evolving specialty requires a developing literature base of original work, and

the content and quality of *The Journal of Family Practice* reflect the state of the art in the clinical, educational, and research elements of this growing specialty. *The Journal* provides a forum and mechanism for the growth of the specialty's literature base as the cutting edge of the advancing field. The progress of the first five years has been gratifying, but new challenges lie ahead. The quality of any scientific journal can be measured by the extent to which its contents are *new, true, important, and comprehensible*.¹ *The Journal* reaffirms its commitment to these goals as it continues to address the needs of the specialty and, ultimately, the patients and families served by their family physicians.

Reference

1. DeBakey L (ed): *The Scientific Journal: Editorial Policies and Practice*. St. Louis, CV Mosby, 1976