
Brief Reports

Impact of Family Practice Literature of Record on Other Medical Literature

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The rise of family practice as an independent academic discipline has been difficult, but the struggle has brought much success. During the past decade the number of academic departments within medical schools that have a family practice component has grown rapidly. These departments have gained solid recognition and in many instances have led the way in developing formal educational programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This leadership has helped to establish the specialty as an equal partner in medi-

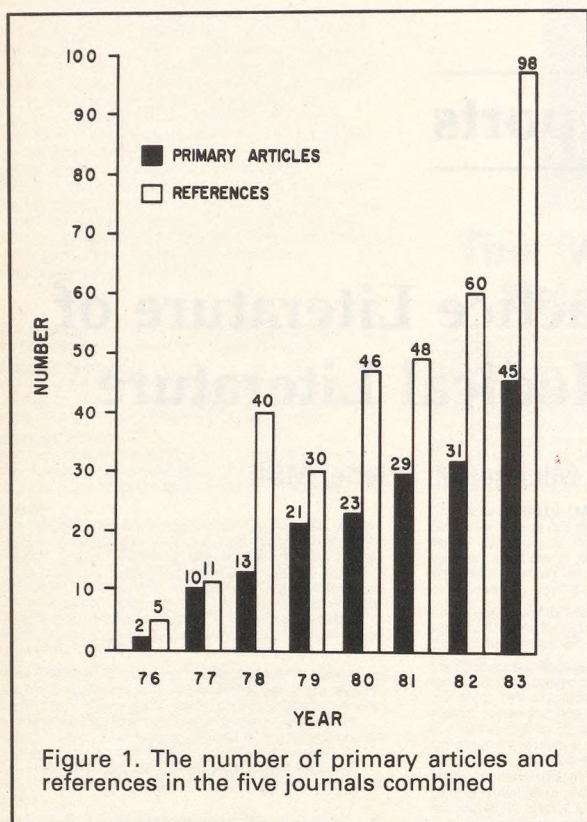
cal education throughout the United States.

Geyman has emphasized, however, that for family practice to become recognized as a unique and independent medical specialty, it must not only develop its own academic discipline based on its particular role in health care, but also contribute new knowledge to medicine and develop its own literature base.¹ This challenge has been the most difficult yet presented to family practice.

Soon after the inception of family practice as a boarded specialty, new journals devoted to presenting family practice literature of record began publication. The journal most widely recognized as the primary journal for family practice literature is *The Journal of Family Practice*. This journal, which began publication in 1974, has aided in meeting the challenge to develop a strong and significant base of literature in family practice.

One indicator that family practice is meeting the challenge of developing its literature base and becoming recognized as an equal partner academically would be the free exchange of scientific

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knowledge between family practice and other closely related medical specialties. Geyman has recently quantified this exchange by performing a citation analysis of all journal references found in the articles of *The Journal of Family Practice* from 1974 through 1982.² He demonstrated that the articles appearing in *The Journal of Family Practice* most frequently cite references from the journal itself. These citations, however, only accounted for 13.6 percent of the total. The next five most frequently cited American journals were *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *Journal of Medical Education*, *Pediatrics*, and *Medical Care*. These journals accounted for 21.1 percent of all citations found.

Geyman's study has shown that the free exchange of medical knowledge has been taking

place—at least in one direction—from other specialties to family practice. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent of this exchange in the opposite direction.

Methods

To survey the impact of family practice literature of record on other medical literature, those journals Geyman found to be most frequently cited in *The Journal of Family Practice* were examined from 1976 through 1983 for articles citing *The Journal of Family Practice* as a reference. Commentaries, editorials, letters to the editor, and book reviews were excluded from this study. For clarity, those articles in other medical journals that reference *The Journal of Family Practice* will be called primary articles in the balance of this report. It should be acknowledged that a large body of family practice literature of record is published in other prestigious medical journals. For purposes of this study, however, articles referenced from *The Journal of Family Practice* were used to readily identify a defined body of family practice literature.

The number of primary articles and the number of references to the journal were determined by year and journal in which they were found. In addition, note was taken of the academic department or specialty of the principal author of the primary article.

Results

A total of 173 primary articles were found over the eight years reviewed. These articles contained

338 references to *The Journal of Family Practice*. The *Journal of Medical Education* accounted for 50 percent of all primary articles and 49 percent of all references. *Medical Care* was next, with 23 percent of the primary articles and 18 percent of the references. These were followed in decreasing order by *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Pediatrics*.

The number of primary articles and references found in all five journals combined is shown in Figure 1. There is a steady increase in both primary articles and references over the years from 1976 to 1983. The number of references increased from five in 1976 to 98 in 1983. The number of articles increased from two in 1976 to 45 in 1983. Both these increases are approximately 20-fold.

Forty-six percent of the authors were from departments of family practice or community medicine, followed in decreasing order by departments of medicine, psychiatry and behavioral sciences, pediatrics, and medical education. From these four specialties come 37 percent of the authors.

Comment

Referencing literature from *The Journal of Family Practice* by both family physicians and non-family physicians increased greatly over the eight years surveyed. Much of this increase is due to the enlarging literature base of family practice contained in *The Journal of Family Practice*. In 1976 *The Journal of Family Practice* had been publishing for only two years, whereas in 1983, nine years of published research was available to be used and referenced.

With this steady increase, it should be noted that there is a significant difference in usage between the five journals. This difference may be explained by taking two factors into consideration. The first is the degree of similarity between family

practice research and that which is published in other journals. *The Journal of Family Practice* contains studies dealing to a great extent with medical education and the health care delivery system. It also contains, but to a lesser extent, clinical research. It is not surprising, then, that the *Journal of Medical Education* and *Medical Care*, which present similar topics of research, would cite *The Journal of Family Practice* more frequently than *The New England Journal of Medicine* or *Pediatrics*, both of which are largely clinically oriented. The second factor is the variety of research published by the other journals. *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The Journal of the American Medical Association* are multidisciplinary journals that publish a wide range of papers from every medical specialty. Therefore, a limited number of articles would be expected to be published on research topics similar enough to family practice research to contain references to *The Journal of Family Practice*. It should be noted, however, that even though the number of primary articles and references are low for some of the journals studied, all have shown increases from 1976 to 1983.

It is clear from this analysis that a free exchange of medical knowledge is occurring between family practice and closely related specialties. In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrated that the family practice literature of record has a growing impact on the literature of closely related medical specialties.

References

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2. Geyman JP: Citation analysis of *The Journal of Family Practice*. *J Fam Pract* 1983; 16:812-819