

Evolution of a Specialty Journal

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The specialty of family medicine was just evolving from its roots in general practice when *The Journal of Family Practice (JFP)* was founded in 1974. In its sixteen years of publication, *JFP* has published much of the original research and chronicled many of the innovative ideas that have shaped family medicine. The influence of this work on the evolving discipline is a testimony to the vision of John Geyman, MD, who served as the Journal's founding editor. It is a privilege for me to follow in his footsteps as the Journal's new editor.

In the years since the Journal was established, family medicine has become a major force in the American health care system. Today, 30% of all medical office visits are to family physicians. Three hundred eighty-five family medicine residency programs now train 11% of all US medical school graduates. These programs graduated 2273 residents in 1989. Studies indicate that these physicians provide coordinated, cost-effective care with an emphasis on prevention. Furthermore, they are more likely than the graduates of other specialties to practice in those geographic areas with the greatest health care needs.

Family medicine has also made important inroads into academic medical centers. One hundred twenty medical schools now have departments, divisions, or sections of family medicine. In these institutions, family physicians are an important source for primary patient care and for patient referrals to tertiary care services. Only 18 "orphan" schools have yet to formally incorporate family medicine into their programs. Unfortunately, this short list includes some of the country's strongest academic institutions.

While family medicine as a discipline has been enjoying unparalleled success, medicine in general has evolved into a crisis situation. Health care services now account for 11% of the gross national product. Much of what the public receives for its billions is of questionable

benefit. A growing segment of the population is either not insured or underinsured. A myriad of schemes have been developed to control rising health care costs. These schemes have been only modestly successful in achieving their goals, and yet have made physicians' lives much more complicated and frustrated.

Family medicine is in a unique position to help lead health care through the complex times ahead. But to be successful, the discipline must have a strong and credible voice—one that can challenge assumptions, take risks, and articulate innovative solutions. This journal and its several thousand authors have been that voice in the past. This is a special responsibility that the discipline entrusted to *The Journal of Family Practice* and one that I take very seriously. If the Journal is to continue to be successful in the future, its voice must remain loud and clear. This will require the Journal to change as it faces new opportunities and new challenges. This issue marks the first of several important changes.

First, readers will note the seal of the American Academy of Family Physicians on the cover. Late in 1990 the leadership of the Academy approved a plan to officially endorse the Journal. This was the culmination of negotiations that were started in 1985. With this decision the Academy is now the publisher of the most successful continuing education journal in the discipline (*American Family Physician*) and endorses the most successful clinical research journal. The endorsement should help each of these complementary journals to strengthen its ability to serve family physicians.

The Journal of Family Practice will continue its primary mission of publishing the highest quality research that is relevant to family medicine. As in the past, much of this work will come from within the specialty; however, the Journal must also attract and publish research that is relevant to family physicians but which comes from outside of the specialty.

The Journal has always maintained an appropriate balance between research and other features. This balance will be maintained, but some past features will be replaced by new ones. The new features will include:

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From Washington: This column will focus on federal programs that affect family medicine. In this issue, Paul Nutting, MD, Director of the Division of Primary Care of the Agency of Health Care Policy and Research, discusses this new agency and its primary care research mission. Future issues will include reports from the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Health Care Financing Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control.

Technology Review: These reviews will critically analyze a technology used in clinical practice. For example, it will help clinicians decide which particular chemistry analyzer, sigmoidoscope, or computerized medical search program is best suited for their office.

In My Experience: This short feature will present the clinical "pearls" that physicians discover from years of medical practice. These may include an approach to a procedure, a useful physical examination finding, a management technique, or other clinical wisdom.

Dimensions: These essays, poems, or illustrations will reflect the human side of medicine. This feature should capture the emotions present in the clinical encounter: joy, sorrow, fear, humor, etc.

I welcome manuscripts from readers for these features and am actively seeking ideas for other new features.

It is essential that the Journal present its contents in a format that is visually clear and attractive. Beginning with this issue, *JFP* is being published in an entirely new style. We believe that the changes will make the Journal easier and more enjoyable to read. Starting in April, all abstracts for original research manuscripts will be presented in an outline format that enables a more efficient review of the study's methods and results.

With its change in editor, the Journal office has moved from Seattle to Augusta, Georgia. In addition to the editor, the new editorial office is staffed by Karen

Shipp, Assistant Editor, and Deborah Nelson, Editorial Assistant. John W. ("Rick") Richards, Jr, MD, will serve as the Journal's new Associate Editor. Many of the readers may be familiar with Dr Richards' work in the area of health promotion. The new Journal staff is committed to working with authors to make the publication process as helpful, smooth, and timely as possible.

Most manuscripts that are eventually published undergo substantial changes as a result of the review process. The reviewers function as expert consultants to assure that published papers are both important and scientifically valid. We have recently added over 300 experienced professionals to the reviewer files. A majority of these reviewers are faculty in community residency programs. Their comments will provide important feedback to our authors as they revise and refine their manuscripts for publication.

A journal is at its best when it can serve as a vehicle for lively debate on the controversial and cutting-edge subjects of its field. To this end, I am extremely happy to have named an Editorial Board that includes some of the most respected, most thoughtful, and most challenging leaders in primary care. The Board includes family physicians in full-time private practice; the editors of the standard textbooks in family medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, and internal medicine; researchers from several outstanding academic departments; residency directors from leading community hospital programs; the editors of two other family medicine journals; medical activists; and a family medicine fellow representative. This is a Board that will not hesitate to challenge the Journal to do more and to be better.

The Journal of Family Practice is currently received by 76,000 physicians and 2000 libraries. It is my expectation that all family physicians will be able to apply the information from this journal to their daily practice. For the Journal to meet their needs, its research must be relevant, its features must be interesting, and its editorials must articulate change. The Journal will continue to strive to be "The source of original work in the discipline." This is a challenging responsibility when there is yet so much to do.