

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Just Feeling the Pulse

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This month's issue of the Journal sees the time of change I alluded to in the August issue (page 111) as we complete the editorial transition first announced in July. Our Editor for the past 6 years, Paul M. Fischer, MD, decided to step down from the editorship earlier this year, and this issue is the first to be edited by our new Editor, Paul A. Nutting, MD. Considering the number of other changes occurring simultaneously, such as a new design and other production changes, we are grateful to Dr Fischer's team in Augusta (John W. "Rick" Richards, Jr, MD, Associate Editor; Melody Collins, Assistant Editor; and Helen Sims, Editorial Assistant) as well as the new editorial office in Denver for helping to ensure a smooth handover.

As the Publisher of JFP, I would like to take this opportunity of paying a special tribute to Paul Fischer and expressing appreciation for his remarkable tenure as Editor. I think I can speak not only for the Editorial Board, but also for the whole specialty of family medicine for the way in which he has developed the Journal through the turbulent times of the early 1990s. The Journal's earlier reputation was founded largely on its success in publishing high-quality academic research in family practice. Paul's accomplishments have been to extend this to high-quality research that is clinically relevant in the daily lives of practicing clinicians. He also introduced many new features and departments, such as technology reviews, the From Washington column, the art, poetry, and humor departments that reflect the human side of medicine, as well as software reviews, tips from practice, the JFP Journal Club, and special articles on a range of topics not normally seen in a medical journal. Above all else, he has shown a deep pride and respect for the responsibility that JFP carries as being the journal of record for the specialty.

The fact that so many authors want to publish in JFP is a testament to Paul's editorship. Submissions increased by 40% over the 5 years 1991–1995 but, inevitably, rejection rates increased as well. Despite this, Paul has been fair in the review process, helping less experienced authors along the way. Each month authors were polled for feedback on the process; typical of the many responses received was "Your journal is among the most efficient and professionally run journals that I have submitted papers to." The choice of articles and topics covered was Paul's and his alone; I, for one, soon discovered that he had his hand firmly on the pulse of family practice and what readers would find interesting. What better evidence of all this

is there than his own decision in 1993 to leave academia and head for the trenches by establishing a network of private family medicine clinics? In wishing him well for the future, my colleagues and I thank him for his steadfast devotion to the Journal.

In many ways, I felt that the search process for a new Editor also enabled me to feel the pulse of family medicine. I spoke to a good cross-section of the specialty, most of whom told me how highly the Journal is regarded. I am still surprised and somewhat flattered at the number of people (15) who made serious application for the editorship; and having to disappoint the 14 runners-up is never a pleasant task. But all this gave me enormous reassurance that the patient is well—a lot of people care deeply about JFP's mission and how it needs to evolve, as it surely has over the years. The underlying commitment to research that builds a scientific base for family practice underpins what JFP is all about.

Building on Paul Fischer's efforts, the selection of articles that are clinically relevant will be extended. As one observer told me: "Perhaps the articles could be shorter, but more importantly, they should be *translated* into clinical relevance." Busy clinicians do not have time to plow through long articles with few summaries or commentaries. Do family practice research journals have to mimic the subspecialty ones? I believe JFP can, and should, help its nonacademic readership by providing the tools to enable clinicians and their patients in our communities to benefit from the fruits of family practice research. In other words, the pulse quickens.

I was delighted when Paul A. Nutting, director of the oldest practice-based research network, the Ambulatory Sentinel Practice Network (ASPN), agreed to serve as the next Editor of JFP. Not only does he bring all the right credentials to the job, as a board member and guest editor of JFP, a wealth of research experience, government appointments, private clinical practice, and teaching, but as Director of ASPN, a physician whose vision for the network matches the mission of the Journal—to get practice-based research driven by practicing family physicians and to bring the results back into the community as efficiently as possible. Paul Nutting outlines his hopes for JFP's future in an accompanying editorial (see page 323). I commend them to you, and invite you also to feel our pulse as we move forward toward a new era in family medicine as the foundation of the nation's health care system.