

Journal of Family Practice

ALTHOUGH general practice in many countries is the largest single branch of the profession, it still has a remarkably small base of literature of its own. Although books and articles about general practice are now appearing with increasing frequency, there nevertheless remains a remarkable dearth of scientific journals of general practice and family medicine.

Sir Theodore Fox once classified medical journals into journals of record and journals of information. The second group includes all those which seek primarily to convey news, factual information, and the large group of journals which primarily publish review articles designed to keep clinicians up to date. By contrast, journals of record are primarily scientific journals, designed to record and chart the evolution of their discipline. It is inevitable that they are superficially less attractive because in outlining with painstaking care small advances in practice, they are necessarily encumbered with detailed figures, lists of tables, and a plethora of statistics.

Both types of journal are essential; both meet a need in all living clinical disciplines. First, there is a necessity for journals of record to report the advances in the discipline, and this can be done only by practitioners of that discipline setting down on paper for discussion and criticism by their peers their ideas and results. Journals of information provide invaluable comment and especially summaries and interpretations, often of the work pioneered in other branches of medicine.

In the English-speaking world general practice has been dangerously short of journals of record, and the evolution of the *Research Newsletter of the College of General Practitioners*, which was renamed on 1 January 1958 the *Journal of the College of General Practitioners*, has proved a precious lifeline through which research-minded general practitioners have been able to breathe life into each other's ideas. It will be an everlasting tribute to the early Research Committee of the College, and particularly to the late Dr R. M. S. McConaghey, that as early as the mid-1950s the need for a journal of record for general practice was identified and met. For more than a decade it fell to the Royal College of General Practitioners in the United Kingdom to produce the only journal in English for general practice of the kind which has been established for many years in many other branches of medicine.

Meanwhile, some other Colleges of general practice and family medicine chose a different priority: in Australia, Canada, and the United States of America the principal object was to provide journals of information for their College members. The College/Academy journals in these countries have for many years contained many review articles by specialists.

If general practice/family medicine is truly an independent discipline in its own right, and if the basis of that discipline can be disseminated across the oceans, there must certainly be a need in areas as great as the North American continent for a journal of record to be produced. That need has now been recognized and is being well met.

North American Continent

The *Journal of Family Practice* is the first attempt on the North American continent to publish a journal of record about the discipline of family medicine. It was started in 1972 and is now well established as the leading monthly journal of general practice on that continent. Here at last are original articles written by family physicians about the discipline of family practice. Here in detail is evidence about the nature of the work done, facts about the problems met, and evidence of the outcomes achieved. Here, in short, is a journal dedicated to improving the quality of family practice.

The Editor is Dr John Geyman, a family physician, and Chairman and Professor of the Department of Family Medicine at the School of Medicine, University of Washington. The journal has an Editorial Board representing many famous departments of family medicine in the United States, and a distinguished Editorial Advisory Board—although both have curiously few family practitioners in everyday non-university practice.

The *Journal of Family Practice* does have one problem—its references. There is a somewhat parochial tendency to cite references to work carried out only, or predominantly, on the North American Continent. The extensive, historically much older, European literature is sometimes ignored, and even when findings have been established previously by Australian, Asian, or European practitioners, later references to similar work on the North American Continent are sometimes cited as if that work had been the original development. In a journal which should legitimately be seeking to hold its place among the leading academic journals of family practice in the world, it is to be hoped that the academic

tradition of acknowledging original work, regardless of its geographical origin, will soon be established.

The contents of the *Journal of Family Practice* are wide ranging. One of its most attractive features—and one where it leads this *Journal*—is the quality of reports of common clinical problems in everyday practice. One recent issue, for example, reported the complaints by patients during the development of depression, a case-controlled survey of dysmenorrhea, and the response of practitioners to abnormal laboratory results.

As in this *Journal* there are many reports on the development of training programmes, of group work, and a strong tendency to report on studies of the family in relation to illness.

The *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners* has stood alone for too long as the journal of

record of English-speaking general practice. The *Journal of Family Practice* has arrived and ought to appear alongside this *Journal* in general practice sections of libraries in practices, postgraduate medical centres, and universities.

We greatly welcome the continuing developments of the *Journal of Family Practice*. We appreciate recent contacts and exchange of ideas. We recognize common aims and common goals. We look forward to continuing mutual co-operation in the future.

Reference

Journal of Family Practice (1979). Appleton-Century-Crofts. 292 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10017. Telephone: 212-532-1700.

Patients and their doctors 1977

RESEARCH by social scientists has provided important new perspectives on the study of general practice, particularly during the last 15 years. While much valuable evidence about what goes on in general practice has come from doctors themselves, the patient's point of view has been somewhat neglected. Social scientists, notably in Wales, such as Robinson (1971) and later Stimson and Webb (1975), have helped to illuminate the patient's preparation for "going to see the doctor", but further analyses are badly needed.

Ann Cartwright's (1967) *Patients and their Doctors—a Study of General Practice*, written from the Institute of Community Studies, was a classic of its kind. It documented more fully than any previous work several of the characteristics of general practice at that time. It highlighted some of the principal deficiencies such as "31 per cent [of practitioners] had not been on any courses in the last five years". She thought then that "an inappropriate medical education and the consequent inappropriate expectations of many general practitioners may contribute to their disillusionment". Nevertheless, at a time when general practice was in considerable trouble, Cartwright reported some tangible gains. Only two per cent of patients at that time felt that their doctors were "not so good" about always visiting when asked. Two thirds felt that if they met their doctor in the street he would know them by name, 93 per cent felt their doctor was good about listening to what they had to say. Two thirds of adults had had the same doctor for at least five years.

Her widely quoted conclusion that "These are the not inconsiderable achievements of general practice at the moment" was well substantiated.

Ten years on

Nevertheless, time has moved on and changes in general practice have developed apace. The last 10 years have seen an increasing growth of group practice and practice teams, a steady move into purpose-planned premises, a rapid increase in the number of vocational trainees, and a spate of books on, from, or about general practice.

We publish today, as *Occasional Paper 8, Patients and Their Doctors 1977* by Ann Cartwright and Robert Anderson, which reports some of the changes which have taken place in general practice between 1964 and 1977 and was submitted to the Royal Commission on the National Health Service.

This report brings Dr Cartwright's earlier work up to date. It was carried out in a similar manner on randomly selected populations and included many of the same questions, although some new ones were introduced. Although many of the findings are predictable, many certainly are not; some give cause for concern.

It remains true that what general practitioners enjoy most about their work is dealing with patients as people and knowing people over a period of time. Freedom and independence have become increasingly important during the last decade.