

On the Developing Literature Base in Family Practice

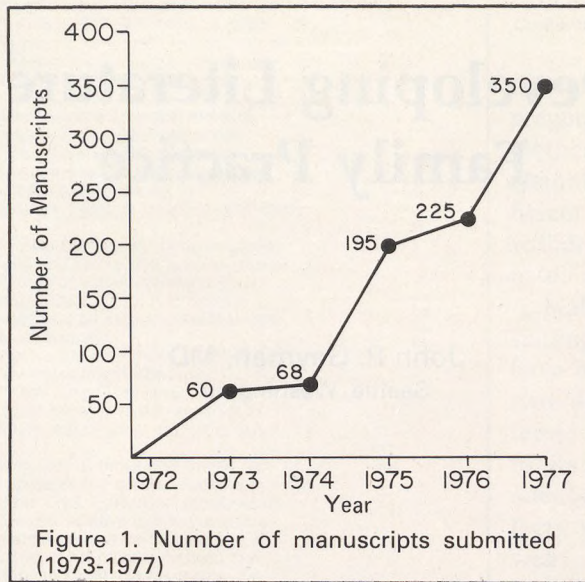
John P. Geyman, MD
Seattle, Washington

One of the required elements in the evolution of any specialty is the development of a literature base in the field. Family practice takes root from general practice, a field derived from portions of many other specialty disciplines without its own traditions in education, research, or literature. The content of existing journals read by general practitioners and family physicians has been contributed in large part by specialists in other fields in an effort to distill advances in their various disciplines for the generalist.

The Journal of Family Practice was initially conceived and developed on the basis of three basic assumptions: (1) that a critical need exists for such a journal in this new specialty; (2) that family physicians and others working in this developing specialty can develop the capacity for original work in the field; and (3) that a balance can be established between clinical, educational, and research subjects which will be of value and interest to academicians, teachers, and practition-

ers alike. This issue represents the start of the fifth year of publication, so that it is useful to look back and briefly assess progress made toward a new literature base in family practice after four full years of publication.

The record of the past four years is indeed impressive. *The Journal* has progressed from a quarterly publication in 1974 to a bimonthly publication in 1975-1976, and has completed a full year in 1977 as a monthly journal. Its contents are fully indexed in *Index Medicus* as part of the world's medical literature. It has become respected by practitioners and educators for its quality based upon repeated objective readership studies. A large majority of published papers have been contributed by family physicians and others within the specialty itself. Over 90 percent of the manuscripts have been spontaneously submitted; the remainder have been invited, but have likewise undergone critical editorial review, and no articles have been commissioned.



The growth of *The Journal* is clearly reflected by Figure 1, which represents the number of manuscripts submitted since 1973. Manuscripts are considered for publication with regard to their significance in advancing and defining the academic discipline of family medicine, their value to the specialty of family practice, and their interest to the practicing family physician. They are individually reviewed on the basis of content, originality, and the evolving needs of the field.

Perhaps the most important implication of the successful growth of *The Journal of Family Practice* is the increasing recognition by the developing specialty of the importance of original work within the field. This represents a major conceptual shift away from the exclusively derivative nature of its predecessor, general practice.

A good start has been made in subjecting the teaching and practice of family medicine to critical inquiry. The need now is to further progress past more conceptual and descriptive papers to the study and reporting of educational and clinical experience in the discipline. The potential is great for continued progress in this direction—teaching programs in family practice are maturing, family practice faculty are expanding their skills, research methods are being developed, and the first ranks of recent graduates of family practice residencies are becoming established in practice. *The Journal* is privileged to participate in this process as a forum joining teaching programs and practicing family physicians in the sharing and recording of progress within the field.