

Publication Characteristics of Family Practice Faculty Nominated for Academic Promotion

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A survey of family practice department chairmen identified 74 faculty who were nominated for promotion during the 1980-81 academic year; 72 percent had medical degrees, 18 percent had academic doctorates, and 11 percent held other degrees. In each professorial rank those promoted had twice as many publications as those not promoted. Successful and unsuccessful candidates also differed noticeably in the median number of journal publications per year spent on the tenure track. These norms are descriptive, not prescriptive. As the discipline develops academically, promotion characteristics are likely to change.

Family practice is a relatively new discipline in the realm of academic medicine. The prototype family practice residency programs are just over ten years old, and most are even younger. Only a few faculty have come into departments of family practice with academic experience in other disciplines. Most physician faculty have come directly from years of experience as practicing general physicians or family physicians.¹ The shortage of academically experienced physician faculty has been particularly acute.

When new faculty receive their first tenure track appointments, they become painfully aware of the "publish or perish" dictum in academia. Faculty find that they must respond to this pressure by publishing a number of papers or books in the five or six years before they are reviewed for

promotion. In this review the focus is often less on clinical competency or teaching than on academic productivity, measured by number of publications, size of research grants, and academic stature.^{2,3}

The purposes of this study were (1) to describe the publication characteristics of family practice faculty who have been nominated for promotion, (2) to describe the special characteristics of family practice faculty who have achieved promotion to a higher academic rank, and (3) to identify the specific journals in which family practice faculty publish their articles.

Methods

Letters were sent to chairmen of 104 departments of family practice associated with academic medical colleges, with two follow-up reminders to nonrespondents. Chairmen were asked to provide information about each departmental faculty member (who would remain nameless) nominated for promotion during academic year 1980-81. The information gathered included academic rank sought, promotion resolution (promoted or denied promotion), number of years on tenure track,

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academic degrees, number of publications (books authored, books edited, book chapters, journal articles), and level of authorship (solo, first, second, or third or later author).

Patient education materials and articles in nonacademic nonprofessional magazines and newsletters were not included in this analysis. All abstracts and conference proceedings were also excluded from the analysis.

Results

Responses were obtained from 83 of the 104 departmental chairmen, an 80 percent response rate. Forty-four (54 percent) of the chairmen reported that no faculty had been nominated for promotion in 1980-81. The other 39 chairmen reported a total of 74 faculty nominated for promotion. Of those 74, 20 were nominated for the rank of assistant professor, 43 for the rank of associate professor, and 11 for the rank of full professor of family practice.

Seventy-two percent of the nominated faculty had Doctor of Medicine degrees, 18 percent had academic doctorates (Doctor of Philosophy, Education, Pharmacy, or Public Health), and 11 percent had other degrees such as Master of Public Health, Master of Science in Nursing, Physician Assistant, or Physician Associate.

Books

Of the 74 nominated faculty, 20 percent had written one or more books. Level of authorship consisted primarily of being solo author (39 percent) or of being a third or later author (28 percent). Sixteen percent of the candidates had edited at least one book. Over 65 percent of the editing was as second or later editor. Chapters in books were written by 34 percent of the nominated faculty. In 52 percent of the book chapters, the candidate was the solo author, and in another 21 percent, the first author.

Journals

The 74 faculty nominated for promotion in family practice had published in 118 distinct journals for an average of 1.6 different journals per candidate. Twenty-eight percent of the nominees had not published in any journals. The names of the journals in which at least three articles were published are listed in Table 1.

Of the 353 journal articles, the respondents identified a level of authorship for 324. For 40 percent of those articles the nominee was the solo author; for 30 percent, the first author; for 18 percent, the second author; and for 12 percent, the third or later author. Despite the trend in medicine toward multiple authorships,^{4,5} the candidate for promotion was the second or later author in only 30 percent of the articles.

By categories of journal type, 72 percent of the 353 journal articles were published in national and international academic journals in the health science, 13 percent were in informative medical journals, 11 percent were in state medical society journals, 3 percent were in other regional medical journals, and 2 percent in nonmedical academic journals.

Promotion Success

Almost two thirds (65 percent) of the nominated faculty achieved promotion. Promotions to assistant professor were achieved by 80 percent of the candidates, to associate professor by 58 percent, and to full professor by 64 percent.

Sixty-seven percent of the physician candidates for any rank were promoted (the highest promotion rate). Candidates with academic doctorates had the lowest promotion rate (57 percent). Sixty-three percent of the nominees with other degrees achieved promotion.

Promoted Vs Nonpromoted Faculty

Some of the publication characteristics of promoted and nonpromoted faculty at each rank are shown in Table 2.

Comment

The publication records of candidates from family practice departments probably do not measure up to the quantitative standards set by some of the more established clinical departments. For example, many medical schools have an unwritten standard of approximately two or three publications for promotion to assistant professor. (Many faculty, however, start at the assistant professor level.) Similarly, candidates for associate professor are usually expected to have somewhere between 8 and 13 referred journal articles, and candidates for full professor usually have even more articles, as well as national recognition and

Table 1. Journals Most Frequently Published in by Family Practice Faculty Nominated for Promotion

Rank	Journal Name (Category*)	Number of Authors	Number of Articles
1	The Journal of Family Practice (III)	29	86
2	Journal of Medical Education (III)	13	23
3	Update International (IV)	2	17
4	Alabama Journal of Medical Sciences (III)	3	15
5	Journal of the American Medical Association (III)	10	11
6	American Family Physician (III)	4	10
7	Journal of Pediatrics (III)	2	5
8	Patient Care (IV)	4	5
9	Medical Care (III)	4	4
10	Journal of the Florida Medical Association (I)	2	4
11	Southern Medical Journal (III)	3	4
12	American Journal of Public Health (III)	3	4
13	Pediatrics (III)	3	3
14	Journal—South Carolina Medical Association (I)	2	3
15	Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners (III)	2	3
16	Mt. Sinai Journal of Medicine (III)	2	3
17	Family Medicine Review (III)	2	3
18	New England Journal of Medicine (III)	2	3

Note: Another 21 journals published only two articles each, and 79 journals published only one article each

*I, state medical journals; II, other regional journals; III, national and international academic journals; IV, informative medical journals; V, nonhealth science academic journals

excellence in one specialized area of research.

While these results may be useful to family practice faculty who wish to assess their progress in academia, there are implications for department chairmen and deans and especially for members of promotions committees. Promotions committee members should familiarize themselves with the goals of family medicine and with the development of family practice as a discipline through a review of the journals in which family practice faculty publish.

In promotion review particular attention should be paid to the roles faculty have played as developers and teachers of academic programs. The time and effort consumed by these activities and the small number of faculty in family practice departments should be considered. Similar claims have been made for reviewers of faculty in the emerging discipline of general internal medicine.⁶

Unlike most other clinical disciplines, departments of family practice have sizable minorities of nonphysicians as tenure track faculty (in this

study, 29 percent of the candidates). These non-physicians include behavioral scientists who conduct marital and family counseling and educators who coordinate faculty development and other educational programs. Although faculty with expertise in behavioral medicine and education are valued within family practice departments, it is likely that some promotions committee members have doubts about whether persons without medical degrees or persons without clinical degrees should have tenured positions in clinical departments.⁷ Leaders in the discipline of family practice have distinct visions about the proper conduct of training programs and about the academic skills that must exist among the faculty; these goals should be considered when the candidates are reviewed for promotion.

Some consideration should also be given to the publication goals in the new discipline. While family practice faculty (especially the physicians) may recognize a need to educate their state and regional colleagues through publications in state and

Table 2. Characteristics of Promoted and Nonpromoted Faculty by Academic Rank Sought

Characteristics	Assistant Professor		Associate Professor		Full Professor	
	Promoted (n=16)	Denied (n=4)	Promoted (n=25)	Denied (n=18)	Promoted (n=7)	Denied (n=4)
Journal articles						
Mean	0.6	0.3	7.4	3.4	11.0	5.0
Median	0.0	0.0	5.0	2.5	10.0	0.0
Range	0-2	0-1	0-46	0-10	4-21	0-20
Book chapters						
Mean	0.5	0.0	0.8	0.8	1.7	0.5
Median	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Range	0-5	0-0	0-8	0-6	0-9	0-2
Books authored						
Mean	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.8
Median	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0
Range	0-1	0-0	0-3	0-2	0-1	0-3
Books edited						
Mean	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.8	0.1	0.0
Median	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Range	0-1	0-0	0-4	0-14	0-1	0-0
Years in tenure track						
Mean	1.7	1.3	5.8	4.3	4.8	5.3
Median	1.5	2.0	4.0	5.0	4.5	5.0
Range	0-5	0-2	0-16	0-10	1-11	5-6

regional medical journals, some members of medical school promotions committees may discount such publications and place importance only on publications in refereed academic journals. A few people even discount as "unacademic" the two academic journals in which family practice candidates publish most frequently, *The Journal of Family Practice* and the *Journal of Medical Education*. While both journals are refereed and have high rejection rates for manuscripts, their inclusion of some educational material leads some promotions committee members to consider them "soft." In reviewing publications, promotions committees must put aside such parochialism and acknowledge the educational needs of family practice.

For each professorial rank (assistant, associate, and full professor) those promoted had published at least twice as many journal articles as those who were not promoted. Successful and unsuccessful candidates also differed noticeably in the median number of journal publications per year spent on the tenure track. Although time spent on tenure track was not a major factor per se, the way

in which the time was spent seemed to be most important.

It is hoped that the results of this study will provide useful information to faculty, department heads, and medical school promotions committees about the current publication characteristics of candidates for promotion in family practice. These norms, however, are descriptive and should not be considered prescriptive. As the discipline develops academically, promotion characteristics of faculty may be expected to change accordingly.

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