SPECIAL THEME: INAUGURAL ISSUE OF THE MALAYSIAN FAMILY PHYSICIAN

LOOKING FORWARD: VIEWS FROM THE ACADEMIA

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The Family Physician, journal of the Academy of Family Physician of Malaysia, has been published for the last thirty years or so. In the past the main emphasis of the journal was on continuing medical education (CME) where reviews and discussion papers predominated over original research articles. Just over 10% of the publications in our journals, over the past three decades, were original papers, and they were mainly surveys. No randomised controlled trials (RCTs) had been published.

With the establishment of university departments of family medicine in the last two decades in Malaysia, we see a slow but gradual increase in Malaysian primary care research and publication. There is a move towards reemphasising the research culture in the universities as well as to excel in research undertakings. More family physicians are seeking research funding, presenting research findings, documenting their works in various publications, and taking pride in research works. In this inaugural issue, it is gratifying to note several original research papers from general practitioners as well as university-based family physicians. This shows that not only university academics are eager to participate in research; general practitioners are also getting involved. This phenomenon is similar to that in Australia and United Kingdom (UK) although the rate of involvement and publication differs.

In a review of general practice research in Australia, there was fivefold increase in the number of general practice research being published between 1990-1999 compared to the previous decade.1 Although university departments of general practice were responsible for most of the research, GPs were involved in at least 60% of all these research reviewed.1 This review in Australia further revealed that fewer than half of the publications focused on clinical topics, two thirds were observational studies, 41% were purely descriptive and only 5% were RCTs.1 In a review of UK published primary care research over a 5-year period, over half of published studies in UK primary care journals were qualitative studies or surveys with a low number of RCTs too (6%).2

Current trend seems to show that family physicians in Malaysia are sending articles to indexed journals before considering the non-indexed journals. Our journal is peer reviewed but not indexed. Hence, we are constantly facing limited number of good original research papers being sent in for consideration of publication. This impedes a steady stream of journal issues to be produced and hence renders it difficult to get the journal indexed in any databases. We hope to devote more pages to original works in future issues of the Malaysian Family Physician – it is by contributing to the literature base of family medicine that will make us eligible for consideration as an indexed journal.3 It is thus important for our journal to attract good original papers. However, the reality is that a vicious circle exists and provided the journal is indexed, researchers are sending their papers elsewhere.

Research provides an evidence base for best clinical practice. Publishing is a duty of all primary care researchers be it academics or practising general practitioners, to share new discoveries and research findings. To encourage research culture in general practice, accreditation exercise of the general practice that includes research activity as one of the quality indicators will greatly enhance primary care research and publication. The future of the journal is decided by all primary care researchers. If each of us play our part and contribute, we will be optimistic to get our journal indexed in the near future.

REFERENCES


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