

Strengthening regional ties and enhancing family medicine – the role of our new journal

Welcome to the first issue of the *Asia Pacific Family Medicine*. For us, as the editors, this represents a significant moment in time – a little like the birth of a child. The gestation has been long and at times arduous, compounded by issues of distance and demands on spare time. However, the importance of the task has carried it forward.

During the planning phase the issue was raised, that as there are over 100 000 journals in the world, why do we want to create another one? This excellent question required from us a clear understanding of what we were trying to achieve and what sort of journal we wanted. After much discussion by the editors' guild and input from key observers, it was agreed that the primary focus was on fostering and promoting the commonality among all family physicians across the entire region, in order to improve patient care, and further develop, uniform standards of practice.

An ambitious aim perhaps, but at a time when the world appears to be fractionating and concentrating on differences, the need has never been greater for all of us to recognize the points where those of us from different cultures, creeds and religions, intersect in our common interests. Wonca conferences provide strong evidence that, in spite of our practice locality, the issues family doctors grapple with in providing the best care they can for their patients within their own geographical, social and political environments are often very similar. It would appear that in reality celebrating our similarities is more important than highlighting our differences.

This journal is by, and for, the 17 member organizations of the Asia Pacific region. We seek the voice of all who practise the skills of family medicine within it and hope that you will come forward to share your stories, your approaches to a variety of clinical problems and your points of view, to the benefit of all.

Although we seek to provide a variety of material, one of this journal's underlying tenets is to foster primary care research from the region. Recognizing family medicine as an independent discipline requires our own body of knowledge, developed and evaluated within the context of how and where we practice. In an editorial in the *Lancet*, Richard Horton pondered whether evidence-based medicine has made the concept of the 'generalist' doctor an anachronism. He

further goes on to say that the 'neglect of research has made primary care one of the most intellectually underdeveloped disciplines in medicine'.¹ We firmly believe that family practice (for the purposes of this journal family practice is an umbrella term embracing general practice, primary care and family medicine) has a burgeoning research basis which is very much alive in our region. In order to foster this, however, the findings need to be disseminated and debated. In this, we believe the journal can play a key role.

As an international journal, respect for our readership demands that we adhere to the highest principles of journal publishing. In addition to submitting all articles to a formal peer review process, we also expect our authors to be open and honest about the nature of their studies, their sources of financial support and any vested conflicts of interest. These are issues of widespread concern and prompted a number of editors from large circulation journals to update the ethics section of *The uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals* for biomedical publication stating that 'the potential for conflict of interest can exist whether or not an individual believes that the relationship affects his or her scientific judgement'.² The need for transparency will be even more essential in a journal such as ours, which addresses such wide cultural interests and diversities.

We hope you enjoy this first issue of our journal. We want to develop a robust correspondence column and would welcome any thoughts you may like to share, especially in relation to material in the journal or about practising medicine in the region. Our aim is for the journal to be both a useful source and resource of regional academic and general medical activity and hope that you will join us in making that aim a reality.

Acknowledgments

There are a number of people who have been instrumental in making this journal a reality but in particular we would like to thank Professor Deborah Saltman from Australia who provided the necessary support and impetus for the first editors meeting which saw a concept grow into a reality. Our gratitude is also extended to Professor Hideyashu Aoyama of Japan, the



Figure 1 The Editor's guild workshop in Sydney 1998.

Macau College and the Philippine Academy of Family Physicians who have provided much needed financial support for the editorial office.

Professor Chris Silagy, who was among many other things an inaugural member of the International Advisory Panel of this journal, passed away peacefully in Melbourne in December 2001, after a long battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Although only 41 at the time of his death, Chris had made an enormous contribution to general practice in the area of general practice research and education. Chris's dynamic energy was legendary and his long list of research activities, publications and international reputation attests to this. He was also always willing to assist a colleague and was known for his sense of

humor and pleasant manner even in the face of considerable personal hardship.

Chris maintained his hectic pace to the last, serving as the Director of the Monash Institute of Health Services Research and also as the Chair of the Board, National Institute of Clinical Studies while continuing his involvement with the Australasian Cochrane Centre. With Chris's passing, a great light has gone out in the area of academic general practice. While his loss to his profession is great, his loss to his four young sons, wife and parents is irreplaceable and our sincere sympathies are with them. Vale Chris.

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References

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