

The Advantage of a General Journal

John J. Frey, III, MD, Medical Editor

Although physicians, collectively, constitute the profession of medicine, the subcultures that physicians inhabit within that profession are increasingly narrower as technology and science dig deeper into life and its functions. But physicians have an obligation to at least be knowledgeable about the range of problems that affect patients and communities. Physicians may see through a particular specialty lens, but they need to get wider views now and then. Medical school is supposed to be about the general education of physicians, and the national exams emphasize that perspective. But too often, especially in the past few decades, the narrow interests that medical school applicants often express even before they start medical school pre-determine—and quickly narrow—their career choices. Focusing too early allows them—as trained physicians—to claim ignorance where they should show curiosity, even if the subject is not one that will be a major part of their clinical career.

The reading and online habits of physicians also can become more narrow as journals with extremely limited coverage of small areas of medicine proliferate. I serve on a panel for the National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health that reviews journals applying for inclusion in PubMed Central, and over the past 20 years, one would think that the number of new journals would be close to being exhausted. Wrong. There are more new journals every year. Many are online open access journals of variable quality on extremely narrow topics or redundant review journals that offer very little that is new on any subject. Each claims to be occupying a niche

that has not been previously addressed. (Why we might need “The International Journal of Left-Handed, Color Blind Colposcopists” remains a mystery to me.) And reading large numbers of very narrow journals makes me think of how, contrary to what is happening

ple, Kowalski and colleagues demonstrate the spread of Babesiosis to the southwestern part of the state that previously has not seen much of it, and raises issues of how a changing environment and climate could change the profile of vectors for disease.¹

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in the world where we are losing ancient languages, medicine has a proliferation journals full of jargon, acronyms, and hypotheses that are unfamiliar to most physicians and are all but unreadable except to a few.

So the need for general journals for general readers remains wide open, but “new” general journals are few and far between because so many physicians and health professionals have become focused on a “field” rather than the profession. All this is to say that *WMJ* remains a general journal in a growing world of specialty publications, and each issue brings together a variety of topics that might have been published in a specialty journal and therefore lost to the readers of *WMJ*.

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Also in this issue is Treffert and Rebedew’s article on the development of a worldwide registry for savant syndrome. It builds on the expertise developed in Wisconsin about savants and continues to describe the nature of the disorder, its correlates with the skills possessed by savants, and its distribution across gender and geography.²

Pabalan and colleagues used emergency department (ED) visits at a children’s hospital to gauge the severity of food insecurity in families.³ While many primary care clinicians are including questions about access to and quality of food as part of their social histories with patients, many people use EDs as a primary care source, so interventions and help relating to food insecurity in that environment could be enormously helpful to families.

Tamunihardjo and colleagues use data from college students about drinking behavior and the location of stores where liquor is

available to find a strong association between binge drinkers and proximity to access to alcohol.⁴ While there are many ways to interpret what they have found, the location of alcohol access to young and underage drinkers should be a public policy discussion if we are going to seriously address the plague of alcoholism and binge drinking that affects the state.

This issue also contains findings from a Wisconsin Medical Society study on physician satisfaction in the state. It reports differing levels of satisfaction by age, location, and practice size that are worth considering. And, it recognizes that continuing dissatisfaction relating to the mix of direct patient care and administrative responsibilities jeopardizes physicians' commitment to practicing medicine over the long term.⁵

This one issue of *WMJ* contains articles that include perspectives on public health, infectious disease, drug side effects, behavioral health, psychiatry, and professionalism that

could well have ended up scattered to many narrower journals and, likely, been unread by a wider audience. General journals give physicians a chance to remain broadly informed and serve an important purpose in the world of medical journalism. Perhaps that's why *WMJ* has been around since 1903.

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