Chapter 10

The Editorial Process of 
Family Medicine*

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Introduction

The growth and expansion of the journal Family Medicine is essential to the relatively new academic discipline of family medicine. While family practice, the clinical arm of family medicine, is well represented by publications aimed toward practicing physicians, Family Medicine is the only journal specifically directed toward family medicine educators and scholars. The content is intended for academic physicians and behavioral and social scientists, nurses, social workers, researchers, members of the clergy, and other professionals actively involved in the discipline.

Since Family Medicine is the official publication of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM) and serves as its voice in matters related to family medicine education, research, and understanding, members should be aware of its editorial procedures and publishing policies. This chapter briefly describes the background, evolution and structure of the journal. The primary purpose of the chapter is to provide an understanding of the journal's current editorial process and to offer suggestions to potential authors and reviewers.

*The editorial process described in the following chapter is representative of most peer-review medical journals; in many ways, it presents an ideal to which other publications should aspire. Ed.
Background and Evolution

One of the early objectives of the new multidisciplinary STFM, established in 1967, was to provide a forum to assist in the definition of the discipline and to serve as a medium for exchange of ideas, new methodologies, and educational experiences. During those early years, a tabloid, Family Practice Times, later named Family Medicine Times (FMT), initially edited by Silas Grant, served as that medium. In 1969, the tabloid was replaced by the FMT Newsletter which the STFM retained for the next 10 years.

While the Needs Assessment Survey of the STFM's membership in 1977 clearly indicated the perceived need for a more formal news publication and articulated the need for a refereed journal, such a journal was beyond the financial capability of the Society. In response to the members' needs, however, Family Medicine Teacher edited by Lynn Carmichael M.D., replaced the Newsletter in January 1979, and served as a bridge to the present more academic journal, Family Medicine.

Structure of the Journal

The Society of Teachers of Family Medicine owns and publishes Family Medicine. In February 1982, the STFM Board of Directors adopted a policy statement which outlined the organizational responsibilities and authority of the Board, Editor, Communications Committee, Managing Publisher, and the STFM Executive Director in matters regarding the journal. Later that year, the Board appointed 12 members to the Editorial Review Board. In addition, members of both the Communications Committee and the Editorial Review Board serve as manuscript reviewers. All members of STFM receive a subscription to Family Medicine. Other subscribers pay a subscription fee determined by the Board and group subscriptions are available.

The Editorial Process

On receipt in the editorial office, all contributions are scanned for appropriateness and suitability for potential publishing in an academic journal. Manuscripts considered by the Editor to be inappropriate to enter the review process are returned to the author with a letter stating the reasons for rejecting the article and, if feasible, inviting the author to resubmit the paper following revisions. Reasons for returning the contribution include excessive length, content more appropriate for a clinical or other specialty journal, lack of proper documentation, incomprehensibility, or such patent scientific flaws that the reason for rejection is obvious. If the manuscript is considered suitable to enter the review process, the Editor selects the reviewers and the author is informed that the paper is under anonymous review. The authors' names, institu-