

Pediatric publications in family medicine journals

Quantity and content

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE To investigate the number and content of articles on pediatric medicine in family medicine journals.

DESIGN Computerized survey in PubMed of the abstracts of all papers published between 2000 and 2002 in four family medicine journals. Abstracts were classified as research or nonresearch. Papers dealing with pediatric medicine were further categorized by main subject area.

SETTING Two North American family medicine journals and two British family medicine journals.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES Number and content of abstracts in family medicine journals: research or not research, describing children only or including adults.

RESULTS Of 1199 abstracts reviewed, 947 (79%) were from research articles and 252 (21%) from nonresearch articles. Of the research abstracts, 73 (7.7%) related to pediatric problems, and 28 (3%) related to both pediatric and adult problems. Of the nonresearch abstracts, 22 (8.7%) involved pediatric patients and 7 (2.8%) combined pediatric and adult populations. In all, nearly 11% of the articles related to pediatric issues. The most common subjects were infectious disease (26%), adolescent medicine (15%), organization of medical care (12%), and asthma (12%).

CONCLUSION Although pediatric care is an essential part of family practice, the percentage of papers on pediatric medicine in family medicine journals is small. We propose that more papers related to pediatric issues be submitted to family medicine journals, which serve as the main source of medical information for family physicians.

EDITOR'S KEY POINTS

- Four family medicine journals from the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada were searched for articles relating to pediatric medicine during the years 2000 to 2002.
- Approximately 11% of all articles published by the journals were on pediatric subjects; the largest categories were infectious disease, adolescent medicine, health care organization, and asthma. Does this figure represent the proportion of pediatric patients in general and family practices in those countries?

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Family medicine involves treating the whole family, including children of all ages. Pediatric problems have a relatively marginal role in family medicine compared with adult problems and geriatric patients with chronic diseases. In fact, a recent paper by Freed et al,¹ using US data over a 20-year period, suggests the number of non-surgical visits of children to pediatricians is increasing while the number of visits to family physicians is decreasing, with both trends reaching statistical significance. Their data indicate that pediatricians see two thirds of the children making visits to doctors.¹ Nevertheless, family physicians in developed countries, as in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Israel, have an important role in treating children and adolescents and in providing preventive medical services.²

Compared with primary care pediatricians, family physicians are trained in a family-oriented model. This difference could be reflected in the content of articles dealing with pediatric problems in family medicine journals.

Although family practice and primary care research have developed a great deal in recent years, high-quality primary care research is still urgently needed. Primary care physicians state an interest in research, but few are actually involved in it.³ Research topics of particular interest to general practitioners are chronic illness, primary care organization, and patient behaviour.⁴ We assumed that family medicine journals would reflect these areas of interest in papers related to pediatrics.

This study aimed to assess the number of pediatric publications in family medicine journals and their content.

METHOD

We searched PubMed for all articles published during the years 2000 through 2002 in two British

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journals (the *British Journal of General Practice* and *Family Practice*) and two North American journals (the *Journal of Family Practice* and *Canadian Family Physician*). We selected these four journals as representative of the family medicine literature, as they are the main journals of family medicine associations in these countries.

In this study we did not need key words because we looked at every abstract in each of the four journals surveyed for the entire study period.

We selected only articles that had abstracts in PubMed. We classified the abstracts as research articles and others (case presentations, review articles, etc), and as one of the following content areas: adult medical problems, pediatric medical problems, combined adult and pediatric medical problems, primary care organization and education, and none of the above. Disagreements among researchers were solved by discussion and joint decision.

We further categorized pediatric articles into such subject areas as infectious diseases, adolescent medicine, and health care organization. If a particular paper was related to more than one subject area, it was listed in each of the areas to which it related.

RESULTS

We reviewed 1199 abstracts; 947 research (79%) and 252 nonresearch (21%) papers. Of the research papers, 73 (7.7%) dealt with pediatric problems and 28 (3%) related to both pediatric and adult problems. Of the nonresearch papers, 22 (8.7%) dealt with pediatric problems and 7 (2.8%) related to both pediatric and adult problems. **Table 1** presents the categories of content for each journal. In all four journals, pediatric research papers were a minority of the journal's overall publication load. All pediatrics-related papers, both research and nonresearch, comprised about 11% of the total number of papers.

Table 2 presents the subject areas of pediatric publications. The most common subject of pediatric papers was infectious diseases. The relatively high percentage of papers on adolescent medicine and health care organization is noteworthy.

Table 1. Categories of publications for each journal assessed

TYPE OF PAPER	BRITISH JOURNAL OF GENERAL PRACTICE		FAMILY PRACTICE		CANADIAN FAMILY PHYSICIAN		JOURNAL OF FAMILY PRACTICE		ALL N (%)
	RESEARCH (%)	NONRESEARCH N (%)	RESEARCH N (%)	NONRESEARCH N (%)	RESEARCH N (%)	NONRESEARCH N (%)	RESEARCH N (%)	NONRESEARCH N (%)	
Adult	182 (58.7)	27 (37.0)	142 (48.5)	14 (38.9)	54 (54.5)	66 (68.0)	166 (67.8)	30 (65.2)	681 (56.8)
Pediatric	28 (9.0)	1 (1.4)	21 (7.2)	3 (8.3)	8 (8.1)	17 (17.5)	16 (6.5)	1 (2.2)	95 (7.9)
Combined	5 (1.6)	1 (1.4)	9 (3.1)	3 (8.3)	1 (1.0)	1 (1.0)	13 (5.3)	2 (4.3)	35 (2.9)
Other	88 (28.4)	41 (56.2)	113 (38.6)	16 (44.4)	32 (32.3)	6 (6.2)	48 (19.6)	13 (28.3)	357 (29.8)
Unspecified	7 (2.3)	3 (4.1)	8 (2.7)	0	4 (4.0)	7 (7.2)	2 (0.8)	0	31 (2.6)
TOTAL	310 (100)	73 (100)	293 (100)	36 (100)	99 (100)	97 (100)	245 (100)	46 (100)	1199 (100)

Table 2. Distribution of content areas in pediatric papers published in family medicine journals: Some papers had more than one content area.

SUBJECT	NUMBER OF PAPERS
Infectious disease	34
Adolescent medicine	19
Health care organization	16
Asthma	15
Preventive medicine and immunization	10
Breastfeeding	10
Health education and health promotion	4
Systematic family approach	4
Neonates	4
Pain therapy	3

DISCUSSION

There could be a publication bias, in which editors of family medicine journals primarily select nonpediatric papers. A second possibility is that family physicians prefer to submit papers relating to pediatric medicine to pediatric journals. A third possibility is that family physician researchers are less interested in pediatrics-related research. Family physicians could be less interested in reading about pediatric issues, having so many other difficult problems in their practices, such as chronic illness, primary care organization, and patient behaviour.⁴ Among the pediatric papers found in these journals were articles related to chronic illness (asthma), to primary care organization, and to patient behaviour (adolescent medicine, breastfeeding). We did not check the original articles, so we do not know whether the authors were family physicians or pediatricians.

This study represents a snapshot of four selected journals. It is interesting to see to what extent pediatric content was featured in them. That, however, is really all that can be concluded from the results of this study. We recommend that family physicians place more emphasis on pediatrics-related research and that they publish the results in family medicine journals, which serve as the main source of medical information for family physicians. ❁

Contributors

Drs Peleg and Biderman both developed the concept, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the final report.

Competing interests

None declared

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