

Canadian Family Physician: 70 years and counting



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In Alan Bennett's Tony award-winning play *The History Boys*, about a group of students preparing for University of Oxford and University of Cambridge entrance examinations under the tutelage of 3 very different teachers, 1 of the educators tells the pupils:

The best moments in reading are when you come across something—a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things—which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.¹

These words and feelings came to mind as I went back in time through the archives of *Canadian Family Physician (CFP)* (available online through the National Library of Medicine²) in preparing to write this editorial celebrating the 70th anniversary of the journal.

The very first edition of the journal using the *Canadian Family Physician* moniker was published in July 1967 as a Canadian centennial project of what was formerly known as the College of General Practice of Canada. (Going back earlier in history, the publication had begun as a newsletter of the College in 1954 and became the *Journal of the College of General Practice of Canada* in 1960, with College executive and the board initially overseeing the publication.³) As the publication moved away from being a newsletter of the College to become an independent medical journal with a broader mandate, the first editor of *CFP*, Dr Rodger Whitman, asked in his inaugural editorial, “Your medical journal—what does it mean to you?”⁴

One of the surprising discoveries I made while delving into *CFP*'s history was how many of the issues of concern to readers and journal contributors over the years have not changed. Questions about our identity—eg, are we general practice physicians or specialists in family medicine^{5,6}—span 7 decades. Debate about the appropriate length of training for a fully capable family physician—2 versus 3 years or longer—was no less contentious in past iterations⁷ than in the most recent one.⁸ Among the practical, clinical aspects of our work the pitfalls of preventive health care, to name but one, have been evergreen.^{9,10}

Unsurprisingly, a recurring theme in *CFP* has been the future of family medicine, one often taken up by the journal's editors, including this one.¹¹ Among the first to do so was David Woods in 1970:

While it's comforting to look back at the '60s—decade of the pill, medicare, the heart transplant and the “non-medical use of drugs”—and at medicine's other achievements during those years, our accelerated pace of life and technology gives us time only for a brief over-the-shoulder glance.¹²

What would he have made of the changes rapidly taking place in family medicine and in the world today, from the climate crisis to the increasing disruptiveness of technology?

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of *CFP* and try to imagine the future of family medicine, there may be no better time to return to the question posed by the founding editor and ask again: In a time of rapidly accelerating change, what does your medical journal mean to you? 🍁

The opinions expressed in editorials are those of the authors. Publication does not imply endorsement by the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

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