How General Medicine Promotes the Research Activities of Generalists

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Research is relevant to all generalists. As described in this journal’s first editorial by the founding Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Tsuguya Fukui, “General Medicine serves as a vehicle to bring about better clinical practice based on sound scientific findings in general medicine.” The academic journal plays a crucial role in transforming research findings into practice or education, and in communicating local results to others. Conducting and reporting clinical research and other types of research is tough work, especially for practicing generalists; however, it is via these research activities that we receive many opportunities to innovate our practice, reflect on our practice style, reorganize our affiliations, measure our quality, and so on. For medical students and residents, the writing of case reports or research results is a good opportunity to obtain skills in project management, critical thinking, searching for references, and rational writing. Thus, research activities should be one of the main functions of academic society. The activities of individual members ultimately empower the activities of our society. Therefore, it is important that General Medicine is well organized and attractive to all generalists.

We published two issues in 2006, but have only published a single issue in other years. We concede that the level of activity of General Medicine has been insufficient. At a meeting in Nagoya during March of this year, the Editorial Board discussed how the status of the Journal could be improved. Meetings of the Editorial Board have been held infrequently since the inception of the Journal. We previously met just once a year, at the annual meeting of the Japanese Society of General Medicine; however, it was decided in March that we should meet at least twice a year, as well as taking part in frequent discussions by e-mail.

We aim to complete three tasks this year: revise the Instructions for Authors, arrange to have the Journal indexed in MEDLINE, and develop an online version of the Journal. Readers will have noticed minor changes to the Instructions for Authors that appear in this issue. The previous instructions were up-to-date and adequate at the time that the first volume was published; however, with the passing of time, problems have arisen that possibly originated from the Instructions for Authors. The categories of articles previously included Original Articles, Short Communications, Case Reports, Review Articles, and Correspondence, but other categories of articles were also considered. This scheme allowed authors to write without strict restrictions, but caused confusion for some. For example, the function and style of Short Communications were not well established, and it was unclear whether an abstract was required. Some authors may have been confused as to whether short reports describing interesting cases should be submitted for consideration as a Short Communications. We occasionally published Special Articles solicited from foreign-based leaders in the field of general medicine, yet this was not mentioned in the Instructions.

Thus, the categories of articles have been reorganized as follows: Original Articles, Editorial, Special Articles, Review Articles, Preliminary Reports, Case Reports, and...
Letters. Original Articles are scientific reports that present the results of original studies. The Editorial and Special Articles are usually coordinated by the editors. We will publish both solicited and unsolicited Review Articles. The editors sometimes arrange Review Articles or Editorial alongside related articles in a given issue for the benefit of readers’ interest and understanding. In the current issue, Drs. Kobori and Maeda present a narrative review of qualitative research methods; the review article sheds light on these remarkable research methods, on which topic an increasing number of submissions have been made to the Journal. The category of ‘Short Communications’ has been renamed ‘Preliminary Reports’ to clarify that the reported findings do not qualify for publication as Original Articles, but are of value for generalists. The prefix ‘Preliminary’ indicates that the reported findings are not conclusive and should be scrutinized in future well-conducted research.

No case reports will be published as Preliminary Reports. Since the first case report in the first issue of the Journal, we have continuously published quality case reports. The description of one patient or a series of patients should be submitted as a Case Report; a well-considered discussion must be included if the case(s) has important clinical or educational implications. We welcome any responses to articles recently published in the Journal, short clinical observations, or opinions; these will be included in the Letters section.

Word limits for the text and abstract are now clearly prescribed, along with restrictions on the number of tables, figures, and references. These limits are more restrictive than those previously; however, we believe that the shorter is the better if the article content remains similar. Although authors generally like to present all of their work in an article, a shorter presentation enables a direct message to be conveyed to readers in the shortest possible time. We do not consider the publication of other article categories, but authors are advised to contact the editors prior to preparation of the manuscript if they intend to write a significant article in a different category from those stated above.

In fostering the interest of authors and readers of the Journal, we fully understand that the profile of the Journal is possibly the most important factor. International visibility is of vital importance for authors who wish to publish their work in medical journals, and the lack of a MEDLINE (PubMed) index for General Medicine explains the current lack of interest in the Journal. This year the Editorial Board will apply for the Journal to be indexed in MEDLINE. There is no doubt that the visibility of articles published in the Journal will significantly increase once this is achieved. The Journal will also appear online to provide improved access for readers from other countries as well as other readers in Japan. We have already obtained some candidates shelves for this purpose.

As described in a previous editorial, generalists are currently facing a turning point regarding their status as medical professionals. In conjunction with other projects run by the Japanese Society of General Medicine, such as generalist training programs led by the Society, the Journal would like to play a role in promoting the status of generalists. We are convinced that the provision of a medical journal with high standards and a high profile as a sound platform for the reporting of generalists’ research findings would benefit the quality of patient care and medical education, as well as increasing the visibility of individual generalists, their affiliations, and our Society.

References