



A time of change

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It is a great honour to be writing this Editorial as the recently appointed Editor in Chief of Australian Family Physician, the journal of record of Australian general practice. This is a newly created position that is intended to ensure AFP remains our discipline's premier publication, rigorous in its academic approach, yet immediately relevant to the realities of practice. Both the journal and the College have been through some tumultuous transitions lately. The challenge now is to carry forward the best elements of both.

I am joining a great team including Professor Chris Del Mar, one of Australia's foremost academic general practitioners whose editorship of AFP's Research section ensures there is an accessible forum for the publication of high quality GP research in Australia. Dr Jenni Parsons has reclaimed her role as Medical Editor, taking over from the excellent work of Dr Linda Calabresi. Both Jenni and Linda have successfully developed the journal from the strong foundations laid by such predecessors as Professor John Murtagh and Dr Lyn Clearihan.

It is fitting that this edition of AFP addresses some of the behaviour changes we seek to encourage in our patients. The facilitation of change is a key general practice skill and one that we use to great effect in improving the health of our patients. Our profession is also passing through a significant period of change and it remains to be seen if we can support each other through these changes in order to achieve the best outcomes for

general practice. There is a great deal at stake for GPs and a lively College with a respected journal is vital if we are to regain our professional momentum. A weakened and dispirited profession may well incur a drop in professional standards and consequent compromise of patient care. General practitioners have worked too hard and too long to allow this to happen, and I believe they will rally behind the College's new leadership to ensure our professional health.

Australian Family Physician plays a key role in the health of Australian general practice. At a time when government policies seem determined to force GPs into geographical boxes, AFP provides one of the few remaining opportunities for GPs from across the breadth and depth of our discipline, enriched by the varied context of their practice, to communicate, share their information, insights and expertise. Rather than being divided by our different practice locations, we should lever off our diversity to expand our role as Australia's family physicians.

The regionalisation of GP training over the past five years has resulted in some significant educational gains. More recent government driven changes have restricted opportunities for the deliverers of GP training to exchange ideas and resources. Australian Family Physician is a national educational resource that is available to all GPs and those in training for general practice. It provides a peer reviewed, Medline listed forum for innovators among the government's regional

training providers to showcase and spread their expertise. Most importantly, AFP belongs to general practice. My view is that AFP is auspiced by the College on behalf of the profession. The College commits considerable resources to the production of AFP, and it does so in the interests of building our discipline. We receive no public funding and, as Editor in Chief, I am responsible not to government bureaucrats but to my fellow GPs.

In a similar way, AFP stands apart from the weekly throwaways because it is the profession's journal. However, a journal is only as good as its previous edition, so if AFP loses its quality or relevance I expect to be held to account by my peers. The Editorial Advisory Panel will play an important and increasing role in the development of AFP. I also hope that those GPs who seek to lead the profession through university or divisional appointments will champion AFP and contribute to its pages.

Change is vital if the profession of general practice (and its institutions) is to continue to develop. Changes that are driven by malicious agendas, or which are ill considered and clumsily instituted, only diminish our profession and must be resisted. I plan for AFP to go through a period of stabilisation and consolidation before we embark on a major consultation and change process to lead AFP into the future. Online learning, competency based assessments and increased international outreach are all in AFP's future. In the meantime, AFP will reaffirm its position as the authoritative voice for general practice in Australia.

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