'An end has a start'

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Online publication date: 15 December 2009

To cite this Article Stoffers Associate Professor of General Practice Chief Editor, Jelle(2009) "An end has a start!", The European Journal of General Practice, 15: 4, 205 — 206
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.3109/13814780903452176
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.3109/13814780903452176
EDITORIAL

‘An end has a start’

In his first Editorial of 2009, Calle Bengtsson, my predecessor, wondered whether nobody had time anymore ‘for things like being Chief Editor of a medical journal’. Well, here I am: a middle-aged male, for more than 20 years combining the profession of general practitioner (family physician) with an academic career at Maastricht University. I am also a member of the Executive Board of the European General Practice Research Network (EGPRN), one of the networks associated to WONCA Europe. (‘If you want a job done, ask a busy man’.)

My personal professional career reflects the emancipation of family medicine in the Netherlands since the 1980s. In 1985, when I started my vocational training (one year!), clinical guidelines did not exist. General practice research was almost not established at Dutch medical schools, and it was hard to find a general practitioner with a PhD. Nowadays, we have guidelines for many conditions, based on evidence provided by primary care research. In line with European regulations, vocational training takes three years. The young GP researchers at my department find it self-evident to strive for a publication in JAMA or BMJ.

For me, applying for the position of Chief Editor of the European Journal of General Practice seemed a natural thing to do. The job fits in well with my work in EGPRN of the last eight years. At EGPRN conferences, I meet colleagues from all over Europe, who work, as family physician and as researcher, under greatly varying conditions. Some have hardly any supportive infrastructure, whereas others are academics with well-established working and funding conditions. It is like looking at a cross section of my own professional life. EGPRN wants to offer a platform for exchange of scientific knowledge and research methodology for all these colleagues. Thus, we aim to support capacity building in European primary care. In my opinion, The European Journal of General Practice should be the international GP/FM journal that shares this emancipatory philosophy.

Like other primary care journals, The European Journal of General Practice wants to be a relevant scientific journal for family physicians and other primary care professionals, primary care researchers, educators, policy makers and maybe even patients. The European Journal of General Practice’s ‘unique selling point’ is being a ‘regional’ journal on an international scale. Unlike the situation in hospital medicine, where technological progress has almost universal impact, primary care research has to deal with differences in health care systems and cultural backgrounds. Being the Chief-Editor of a European journal of general practice (family medicine, primary care), I want to value and respect these regional differences in our peer review process and publication policy, while maintaining the highest possible quality standards (see: www.equator-network.org). European primary care deserves an independent scientific journal which is attractive for many readers by reflecting the state of the art in this region.

In my view, fulfilling and maintaining all criteria for receiving an impact factor is essential for the chances of survival of the European Journal of General Practice in the long-term. Last year, thanks to the excellent work of the team of interim-editors led by Calle Bengtsson, and the generous support of the Publisher, the Journal managed to survive. I hope to continue this success the coming five years, by producing issues that will appear on time and will contain interesting papers of good quality. For the moment, I have a good team of interim-editors and we will start recruiting new enthusiastic editors for the coming year. We also will put a lot of energy in attracting experts to review for the Journal. I am very lucky to have the support of an excellent editorial assistant, Mrs Anneke Germeraad-Uriot. We are ready to give our authors and readers the highest possible service with regard to efficient manuscript flow, constructive feedback, guidance on writing, and open communication.

Of course, there are challenges. To survive as a scientific journal, *The European Journal of General Practice* not only needs an impact factor, but also needs subscribers. The Publisher has creative plans to persuade you (or your organization) to take a subscription on *The European Journal of General Practice*. For the years to come, a crucial decision the Journal will have to make is how to deal with the growing demand for ‘open access’ to scientific publications. When all is said and done, it comes down to answering the question ‘Who pays?’ Both, ‘author based’ and ‘reader based’ payment models, have advantages and disadvantages. Anyhow, for the development of the discipline it is crucial that there are as little barriers as possible for authors (GP researchers who produce evidence) and readers (practising and researching GPs who use evidence). In particular, this applies to colleagues with limited resources.

My team and I will do our best to give European primary care a lively scientific journal. This last issue of 2009 contains a variety of papers from different countries, including the first paper of a series on the European Research Agenda for General Practice/Family Medicine and Primary Care. We hope that many authors and readers will agree that making this journal a success is a collective responsibility of us all. If you submit and subscribe (or ask your librarian to do so), then we will do the rest. Happy New Year!

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Chief Editor