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Ever increasing need for family physicians

Waris Qidwai

Aga Khan University, waris.qidwai@aku.edu

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Recommended Citation

Qidwai, W. (2004). Ever increasing need for family physicians. *European Journal of General Practice*, 10(3), 111-111.

Available at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_mc_fam_med/141



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To cite this article: Waris Qidwai (2004) Ever increasing need for family physicians!, The European Journal of General Practice, 10:3, 111-111, DOI: [10.3109/13814780409044549](https://doi.org/10.3109/13814780409044549)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.3109/13814780409044549>



Published online: 11 Jul 2009.



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The popularity of family medicine as a career choice is unfortunately reported to be on the decline.^{1,3} Regrettably, decades after official recognition of family medicine as a speciality, it is still not given the same status as other primary care disciplines by the medical profession.⁴

The role of family physicians has become questionable to some,⁵ despite the presentation of patient problems that transgress speciality boundaries.⁶ This ongoing debate has led to frustration and low morale among family physicians who unnecessarily feel undervalued. The unprecedented super-specialisation taking place in medical practice has made the role of family physicians indispensable. It is known that primary healthcare is of fundamental importance to the maintenance and improvement of health.⁷

Twentieth century specialisation has led to the rapid deterioration in the doctor-patient relationship. Family medicine, by virtue of its inherent emphasis on a strong doctor-patient relationship, can help restore confidence of the public in the medical profession.

As the age of specialisation reaches its culmination, we desperately need trained and qualified family physicians, with a definite role and a defined set of skills. This will help bring about union across fragmented medical care today.

The commitment to patients, continuity of care, patient education, health maintenance and disease prevention are the essential elements of good family practice. The hallmark of family medicine is the holistic approach towards patient care. Family physicians share the same habitat as their patients and consider themselves part of a health system. Family physicians follow a bio-psycho-social model of medical practice and give importance to subjective aspects of medicine. It would be unrealistic to expect a super specialist to follow such a model of practice. The frontline position of

family physicians offers them a unique position to act as resource managers. The cost of healthcare increases with specialisation and technological advancement.

It is imperative for family physicians to continue improving their skills and knowledge, since family medicine is a challenging speciality.

In today's world of specialisation and complex medical practice, the presence of family physicians has become mandatory for the success of any healthcare delivery system. Indeed, it is not a small privilege to be a family physician today! ■

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Waris Qidwai MD MCPS FCPS, associate professor of family medicine
Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan
E-mail: waris@akunet.org