A scholarly discipline comes of age

David P Stevens

How do you know when a scholarly discipline comes of age? For example, just two or three decades ago, the field of health services research was an infant, with little attention paid to it in the halls of academe. Now, it is a mainstream discipline where attention paid to it in the halls of academe.

Many readers of QSHC who have toiled in the scholarly vineyards of healthcare improvement and patient safety certainly consider these fields mainstream. Nevertheless, many in healthcare, particularly academe, are just beginning to acknowledge the centrality of these fields. I propose that scholarship in these fields is indeed close to full-blown adulthood. What are the signs? Here are five.

LENGTHENING QUEUE OF EXCELLENT ACCEPTED QSHC PAPERS

There was a time—just 5 years ago—when the editors of QSHC had to scramble to find sufficient numbers of scholarly papers to fill 80 pages for publication every 2 months. Now, in spite of an ever-higher bar for acceptance of scholarly papers, the queue of accepted papers awaiting publication in the print journal has lengthened to an intolerable duration—over a year.

The good news, on the other hand, is that, as of 2010, QSHC will publish accepted papers Online First, a BMJ service that allows authors to see their papers available to readers online soon after formal acceptance, usually within the time required to proof and post PDF versions of their accepted papers. As a result, the queue will be eliminated, and in the future, accepted papers will be posted soon after making their way through the review process.

EXPANDING BREADTH OF SCHOLARLY QUALITY AND SAFETY JOURNALS

There is a growing number of scholarly journals such as QSHC that are specifically focused on implementation of improvement and patient safety strategies. Now, new journals in wider fields of health and healthcare are coming to the fore, reflecting a broadening commitment to improvement and safety. Examples include Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes, a discipline-focused journal with a strong focus on improvement in cardiovascular diseases. Other specialty journals such as Annals of Internal Medicine and Journal of General Internal Medicine are examples of general clinical journals that have committed pages, sections or special issues specifically to improvement and safety.

CHANGING POLICY BY ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION AGENCIES

In the USA, the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education and the American Board of Medical Specialties have advanced practice-based learning and improvement and systems knowledge as two of the six General Competencies for training programme accreditation and specialty recertification respectively. This policy shift adds strong pressure on development of the scholarship that underlies these elements of medical practice. A new journal, the Journal of Graduate Medical Education devotes specific pages to practice-based improvement and systems knowledge. While these reports often focus on education, they are increasingly linked to the improved clinical outcomes that result from improvement education. This change in accreditation and certification policy has served to contribute to rigorous and innovative scholarship.

REFLECTIONS


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REFERENCES