

The first ten years of the Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors 2012-2022 - a review

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ABSTRACT

Background

Since 1990 the Malta College of Family Doctors (MCFD) has regularly published a journal under different names: *'It-Tabib tal-Familja'* (1990-2000), *'The Family Physician - It-Tabib tal-Familja'* (2000-2004), *'Maltese Family Doctor'* (2005-2010) and the *'Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors (JMCFD)'* (since 2012).

Objective

This review of the issues published of the JMCFD during 2012-2022 was undertaken to study not only the dates and numbers of issues but also issue themes, article types and topics and author specialities/grades.

Method

Information regarding all JMCFD issues published between 2012 and 2022 was gathered and inserted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to enable scrutiny of the content by quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Results

One hundred and thirty-eight articles were published in the twenty-four issues of the JMCFD that came out during 2012-22. While the themes of all issues were related to family medicine, several of them also focused on certain topics, with one third tackling education. Research articles made up 29% of all articles, while family medicine was the most popular topic (46%). Most of the 235 authors were males (62%) and family doctors (54%).

Conclusion

The JMCFD prioritises publication of submitted / peer-reviewed articles to focus on quality over quantity, while maintaining its focus on family medicine in general and education in particular. Besides serving as a source of information useful for family doctors in their practices, the journal provides the opportunity to family doctors, other specialists and trainee doctors to submit their research for consideration towards publication in a peer-reviewed family medicine journal.

Key Words

Review, publications, family practice, education, Malta

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Malta College of Family Doctors (MCFD) has published a journal regularly since 1990, the year it was formally set up (see Table 1). The first issue of '*It-Tabib tal-Familja*' came out in September 1990 as a four-page newsletter, with Dr Godfrey Farrugia as editor. In 1993 Dr Jean Karl Soler replaced Dr Farrugia as editor and two years later the newsletter was converted to a colour journal. Then in 2000 the journal was renamed '*The Family Physician - It-Tabib tal-Familja*' as part of an academic upgrade to recruit papers from the Mediterranean region that also involved the appointment of three international peer reviewers and an international scientific advisory board. Dr Noel Caruana was appointed editor in 2005, with the journal undergoing another change in name to the '*Maltese Family Doctor*'. (Sammut, 2015)

The journal was relaunched in 2012 with the name '*Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors*' (JMCFD) and Prof. Pierre Mallia as editor. In 2021 Dr Mario R Sammut and Dr Anton Bugeja took over as joint editors of the JMCFD, with the latter relinquishing his post in 2022 to leave Dr Sammut as sole editor. Over the 33 years since 1990, fifty-nine issues of the MCFD's journal (in its various formats) have been published (see Table 1).

Objective

On the tenth anniversary of the launch of the JMCFD, this review was undertaken to analyse the issues of the JMCFD that were published during 2012-2022. The study examined not only dates and numbers of issues but also issue themes, article types and topics, and author specialities/grades.

METHOD

The following information regarding all JMCFD issues published between 2012 and 2022 was gathered and inserted into a spreadsheet using the computer software programme Microsoft Excel to enable scrutiny of the content by quantitative and qualitative analysis:

- year and month of issue;
- volume and issue numbers;
- theme of issue;
- article type, topic and name;
- author names, gender and speciality/grade.

As no sensitive personal data were gathered, ethics committee approval was not required for this study.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the year and month, volume and issue numbers, theme and numbers of articles for each issue of the JMCFD published during 2012-2022.

Table 1: Details of all MCFD journals published during 1990-2023

NAME	YEARS	EDITOR/S	VOLUME NO.	ISSUES
It-Tabib tal-Familja	1990 - 1991	Godfrey Farrugia		3
	1993 - 2000	Jean Karl Soler		15
The Family Physician - It-Tabib tal-Familja	2000 - 2004	Jean Karl Soler		7
Maltese Family Doctor	2005 - 2010	Noel Caruana	14 - 19	9
	2012 - 2020	Pierre Mallia	1 - 9	22
Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors	2021 - 2022	Mario R Sammut & Anton Bugeja	10 - 11	2
	2023 -	Mario R Sammut	12	1
			TOTAL	59

Table 2: Year, month, volume, issue, theme and article numbers of each issue of the JMCFD during 2012-2022

YEAR	MONTH	VOLUME	ISSUE	THEME	ARTICLES
2012	August	1	1	None	7
	November	1	2	Education in Family Medicine. What has been achieved?	11
2013	April	2	1	Family medicine: present & future	7
	August	2	2	Ethics: Current issues	9
	December	2	3	Education & Geriatrics	6
2014	May	3	1	Child health	5
	September	3	2	Mental health	7
	December	3	3	Training & Assessment	6
2015	May	4	1	Paediatrics	6
	September	4	2	25 years of the MCFD	5
	December	4	3	FMCFD and MMCFD graduation 2015	4
2016	April	5	1	The diversity of family medicine	4
	August	5	2	Family Medicine: from the cradle to the grave	7
	December	5	3	MMCFD and Teachers' Course Graduation 22 November 2016	6
2017	April	6	1	Primary Care Management of patients, conditions, colleagues and services	6
	August	6	2	Sports and exercise medicine	7
	December	6	3	MCFD Graduation 28 November 2017	5
2018	June	7	1	Dr Tania van Avendonk 1964 - 2018	4
	December	7	2	Primary health care	4
2019	June	8	1	Family Medicine and the Specialist Register	4
	December	8	2	Family Medicine Training and Practice	4
2020	December	9	1	Ensuring Quality of Family Practice and Training	4
2021	December	10	1	A new normal for family doctors	4
2022	December	11	1	Primary - Secondary Interdisciplinary Case	6
TOTAL					138

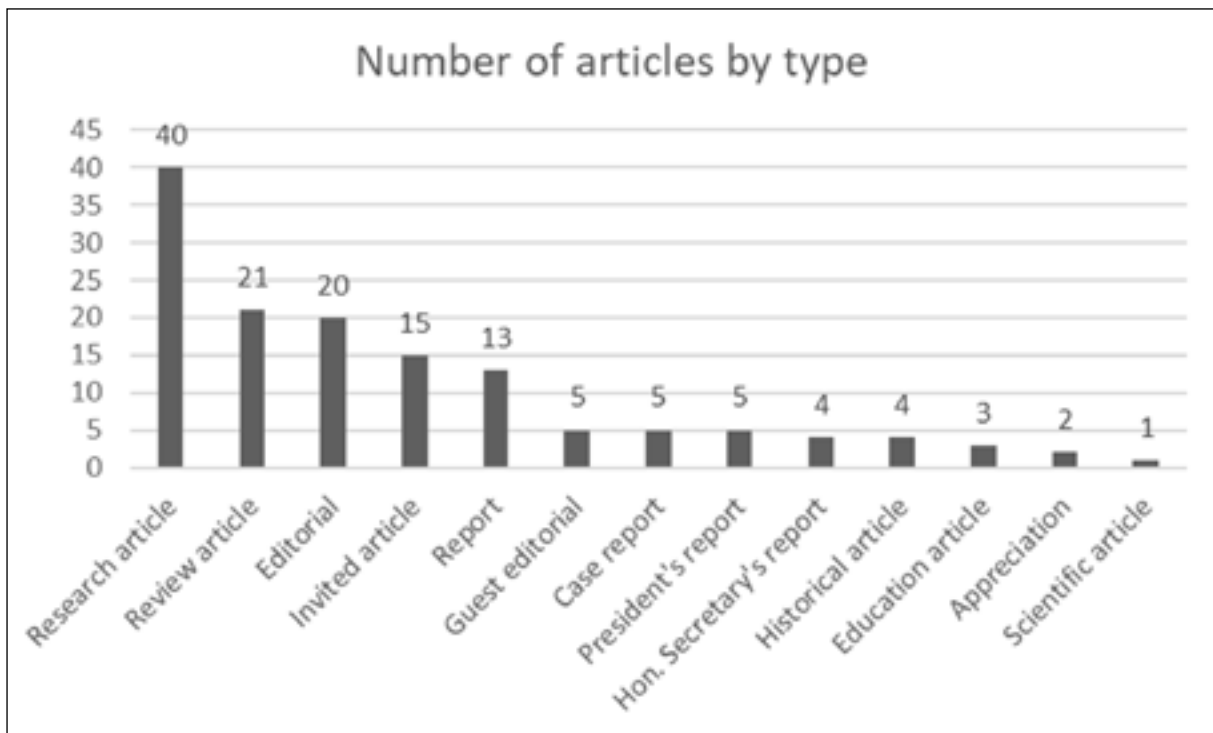


Figure 1: Number of articles by type published in the JMCFD during 2012-22

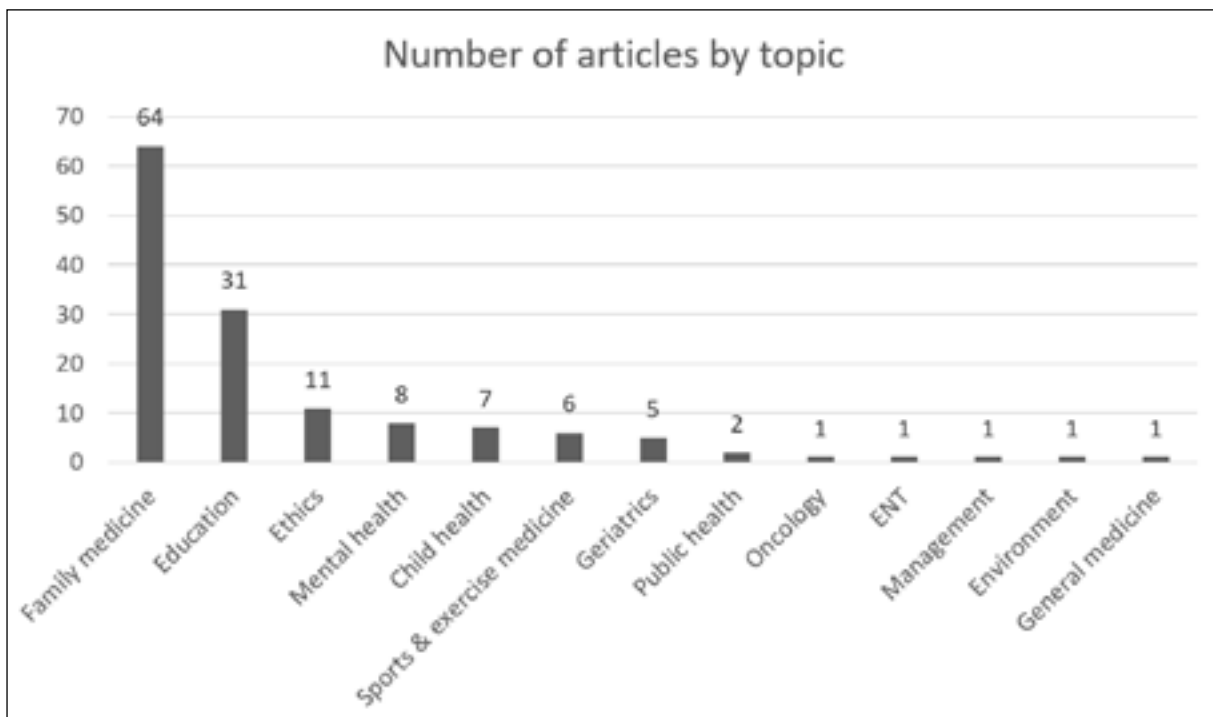


Figure 2: Number of articles by topic published in the JMCFD during 2012-22

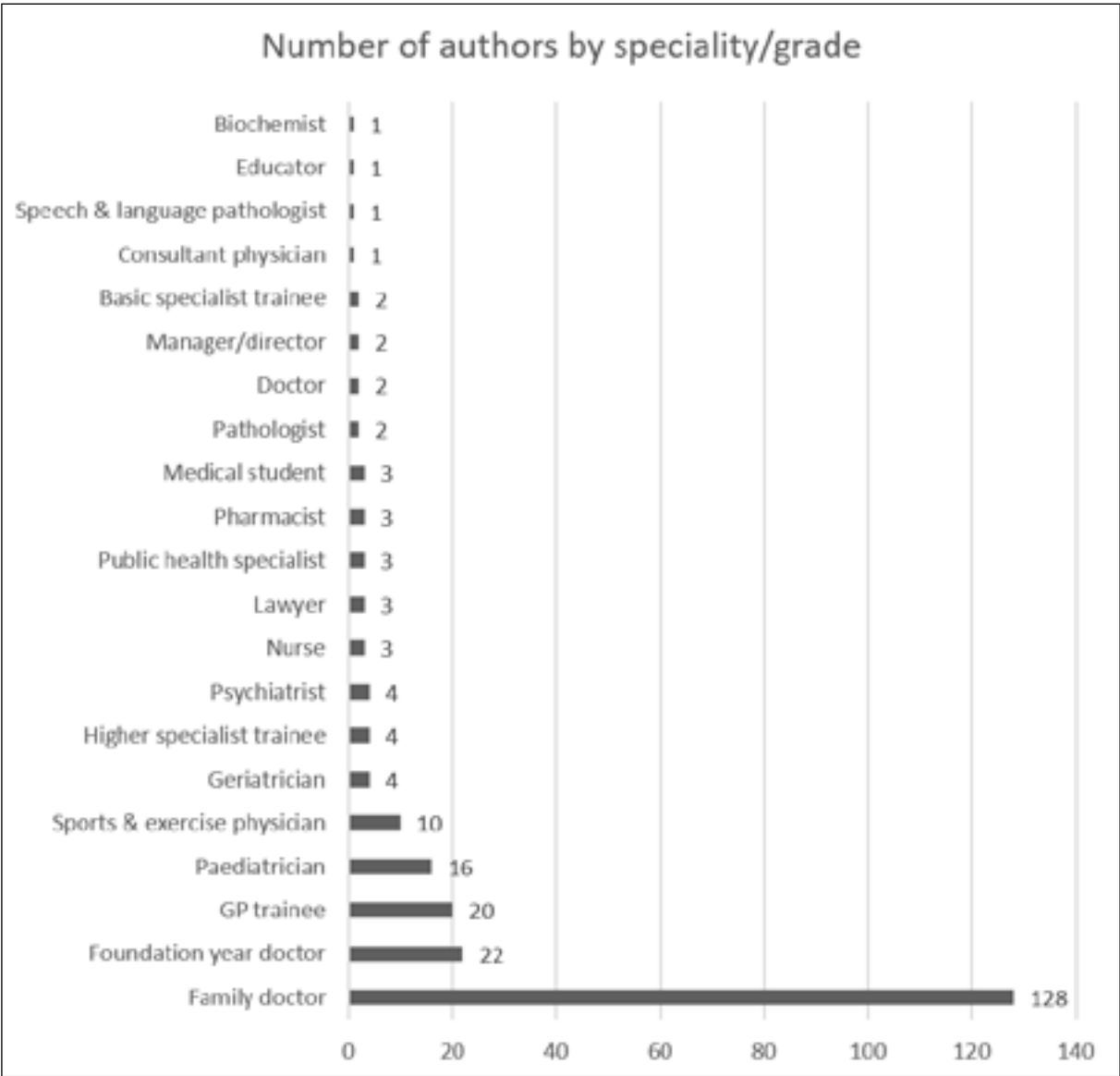


Figure 3: Number of authors by specialty/grade of articles published in the JMCFD during 2012-22

One hundred and thirty-eight articles (see Table 2) were published in the 24 issues of the JMCFD that came out during 2012-2022 (see Table 1), i.e. an average of 5.75 articles per issue.

While the themes of all issues were related to family medicine (see Table 2 for details), a number of them also focused on the following topics:

- Education (8 issues);
- Child health / paediatrics (2 issues);
- Ethics, geriatrics, mental health and sport & exercise medicine (1 issue each).

Of note were two special issues, one celebrating 25 years of the MCFD in 2015 and another commemorating the life of MCFD former Council Member Dr Tania van Avendonk 1964 – 2018.

Figure 1 displays the number of articles by type. Excluding editorials and guest editorials (25 in total), the top four consisted of research articles (n=40 or 29% of all articles), review articles (21 or 15%), invited articles (15 or 11%) and reports (13 or 9%). The classification of articles by topic may be seen in Figure 2, with family medicine being the most popular (n=64 or 46% of all articles) followed by education (31 or 22%).

No less than 235 different authors (147 males or 62% and 89 females or 38%) contributed to the 138 articles published during 2012-2022 (see Figure 3). Most authors were family doctors (n=128 or 54% of all authors), with the next highest being foundation year doctors (22 or 9%) and GP trainees (20 or 8%), followed by paediatricians (16 or 7%) and sport & exercise physicians (10 or 4%).

DISCUSSION

During the first six years (2012-2017) of the JMCFD, the journal was published three times a year, then twice a year during 2018-2019, following which (2020-2023) it was published once yearly. While the invitation of recognised

experts to author commentaries is known to be practiced by peer-reviewed medical journals (Thomas et al, 2019), the current editorial board had agreed to avoid where possible the inclusion of invited articles / reports in order to comply strictly with the ethos of the JMCFD as a peer-reviewed journal. This focus on quality over quantity by limiting publication to submitted / peer-reviewed articles has resulted in a drop of the JMCFD's frequency of publication from three times to once a year.

The practice of publishing theme issues is common among international journals (Jones and Moss, 2010; Mondello and Pedersen, 2003; Zawacki-Richter and Naidu, 2016). Of the twenty-four issues included in this review, eight issues (33%) focused on education, in line with the JMCFD's mission of encouraging improved patient care through academic development of the discipline of family medicine (Journal of the Malta College of Family Doctors, 2012). Another six (25%) were theme issues dedicated to specialities closely related to family medicine, specifically child health / paediatrics (two issues) and ethics, geriatrics, mental health and sport & exercise medicine (one issue each) (Bugeja, 2022).

Research and review articles and case reports together formed the majority (n=66 or 48%) of the 138 articles published in the JMCFD during 2012-2022, with invited articles and reports (n=28) making up another 20%. As explained in the editorial of the first issue of the JMCFD, the journal was relaunched to attract studies in general practice and thus serve as a source of information useful for family doctors in their practices (Mallia, 2012). In fact, 64 or 46% of the article topics were directly related to family medicine, while the other topics were also of interest to the family doctor in view of the latter's wide role in managing undifferentiated illness, dealing with all health problems and interacting with other specialities (World Organisation of Family Doctors – Europe, 2023).

As might be expected, the majority of authors were family doctors (54%), immediately followed by foundation year doctors (9%). While the latter finding may seem unusual, it is known that these young doctors in training are keen to further their careers and publication is known to be a key contributor to such advancement in health professions (McGaghie, 2009). It is encouraging to note that GP trainees formed the next highest group of authors (8%), in line with the importance given to research by the Specialist Training Programme in Family Medicine (Zammit, Sammut and Abela, 2017).

Study strength, limitation and implication for the future

While the fact that this content analysis of the JMCFD was carried out for the first time was a strength of this review, one limitation was that the review was limited to the 24 issues of the JMCFD published during 2012-2022 and excluded the 34 journal issues printed previously by the MCFD during 1990-2020. Such research comparing the content of issues of all four journals published by the MCFD would clarify further the path that the College journal has taken since its foundation in 1990 and benefit its future direction.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully analysed the contents of the 24 issues of the JMCFD published during 2012-22. The journal has in recent years limited publication to submitted / peer-reviewed articles to focus on quality over quantity, while maintaining its focus on family medicine in general and education in particular. Besides serving as a source of information useful for family doctors in their practices, the journal provides the opportunity to family doctors, doctors in training and other related specialists to submit their research studies for consideration towards publication in a peer-reviewed family medicine journal.

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