

Celebrating 25 volumes of the *Australian Journal of Primary Health*

Virginia Lewis

Australian Institute for Primary Care and Ageing, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic. 3083, Australia.
Email: V.Lewis@latrobe.edu.au

Last year the *Australian Journal of Primary Health* (AJPH) achieved a major milestone in publishing its 25th volume. From its inception in 1995, the Journal has sought to provide high-quality, robust evidence and commentary on community health services, primary care and primary health. The structure of the Journal and its collaborative co-ordinating mechanisms were innovative in their linkages between key organisations in the field, the multidisciplinary professions, and academic programs.

The AJPH had its origins as a newsletter of the Victorian Community Health Association (VCHA). Heather Gardner, Head of the then School of Behavioural Health Sciences at La Trobe University, negotiated the establishment of a new journal based on the VCHA newsletter with Shirley Freeman, the then President of the Association. As its first Editor, Heather was central to the successful development of the Journal to meet the needs of a broad, national and international primary health care community. The Journal was driven forward by her energy and commitment to editorial quality. She encouraged researchers, primary healthcare (PHC) clinicians, staff in community health services, and those involved in developing policy to publish research findings, practice-based experiences and topical discussion papers. Her vision to publish robust evidence, promote debate and inform the direction of primary and community health care in Australia underpins the Journal to this day.

Responsibility for managing the Journal transferred to the Australian Institute for Primary Care (AIPC, now the Australian Institute for Primary Care and Ageing (AIPCA)) when it was established by La Trobe University in 1997. Rae Walker and Hal Swerissen became co-Editors during this period, and Jenny Macmillan took on the role of Executive Officer. As Director of the AIPCA, Hal supported the Journal to develop a national focus through establishing an Advisory Board and convening a National Primary and Community Health Network. The Journal was produced 'in-house' by the AIPCA under Jenny's supervision, including marketing and subscriptions management, guiding papers through peer-review processes, and distributing by mail. Layout and printing were the only aspects of production that were done externally.

Rae Walker later became sole Editor and had a key role in setting and supporting the Journal's strategic direction. She was instrumental in making sure the Journal retained a focus on practice and broader policy questions as well as research. Rae also had a major role in developing the Journal's governance structure, including being instrumental in contracting the publication of the Journal to CSIRO Publishing in 2009. This shift to a

professional publisher was a significant step for the Journal, leading to redesigning the format, enhancing internal processes and broadening opportunities for distribution and readership. The Journal also benefitted from the prestige of association with the CSIRO brand. CSIRO Publishing focussed on building up institutional subscriptions from universities and primary health organisations and broadening the reach of the Journal through opportunities such as Hinari, which enables free access to low- and middle-income countries to biomedical and health literature.

The partnership with CSIRO was particularly important as the context for PHC research in Australia was changing. As a result of the PHC Research Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) Strategy, direct funding for PHC research was provided to universities and the Australian Primary Care Research Institute was established in 2003 to distribute funding and support research capacity building across the sector. The Primary Health Care Research and Information Service (PHCRIS) was the other key organisation funded under the PHCRED Strategy in 2001 to collect, synthesise and share information and knowledge about PHC and support networking. In the context of the perennial drive to 'publish or perish' within the research industry, PHCRED helped to increase PHC research and research outputs in Australia.

In 2009, Libby Kalucy, a primary healthcare researcher from Flinders University South Australia and the Chief Executive Officer for PHCRIS joined Rae Walker as co-Editor, becoming sole Editor from 2010 after Rae stepped down, until the end of 2014. Libby's experience and expertise in effective knowledge translation supported the strategic development and management of the Journal.

To improve the Journal's processes, particularly in the context of the increasing number of submissions, an Editorial Panel of five Associate Editors was established in 2010, the previous Advisory group was disbanded and the Editorial Board restructured. This structure was more consistent with typical academic journal governance and provided access to a wider network of potential reviewers to cover the diversity of research topics and methodologies while maintaining the relevance of the Journal to front line practitioners. Sponsorship from the Victorian Department of Health during this period reflected the growing interest of policy advisors and decision-makers in using evidence. At the suggestion of CSIRO Publishing, the AJPH increased the number of pages per issue and later the number of issues per volume to decrease the delay between acceptance and

publication, balancing the cost of publishing more papers by reducing the word limit for manuscripts. The Journal continued to be produced in hard copy only during this period although readers and subscribers showed increasing interest in an electronic format.

In 2010 the Journal celebrated being indexed in Medline and receiving its first Impact Factor. It was now on the radar of the main source of biomedical and health information. Inclusion in Medline meant research in AJPH was open to an even wider audience, a welcome encouragement to the contributors, reviewers, editors, publishers, subscribers and readers of the Journal. The Journal's reach and readership was further enhanced when it started publishing online in 2014; however, it continues to be printed and distributed as a physical journal as part of its service to community-based organisations, many of whom do not have access to libraries or online-only journals. The AJPH is now indexed or abstracted in ~20 databases.

At Libby's suggestion, the Journal supported PHC in Australia and increased its profile by awarding a prize to the best research paper or symposium relevant to the Journal's interests presented at the PHCRIS annual conference from 2009 to 2018. While PHCRIS ceased operating conferences after 2018, the Journal continues to support researchers by working with the Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care (AAAPC) conference to offer a prize in 2019 and 2020.

In 2015, following Libby's retirement, Amanda Kenny from La Trobe University's School of Rural Health and Virginia Lewis from the AIPCA became co-Editors-in-Chief, having been Associate Editors for several years. During her tenure, Mandy ensured that, through CSIRO Publishing, the Journal was a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and supported the recommendations of the COPE Core Practices in the Journal's policies and procedures. Mandy retired from the role in late 2019, leaving Virginia as sole Editor-in-Chief.

Between 1995 and 2020 the papers published in the Journal reflect many changes in policies affecting funding, management and organisation of primary health care in Australia and

internationally. Despite these changes, the fundamentals of primary health care are maintained and research continues to address questions of importance to the health sector and communities. Social inequities and disadvantage remain, people need help, and health workers want to improve the effectiveness of their work. The AJPH is one of the few journals with a mandate to explore the diversity and complexity of primary health care practice and research, which makes it a valuable contributor to the global literature.

In 2008 Rae Walker described the role of the Journal in words that are still relevant in 2020:

[The AJPH has provided] a voice for researchers and research-informed practitioners interested in the health of the community and the provision of primary health care services. The Journal builds on a long tradition of multi-disciplinary research and practice in primary care, and reflects widely held values that emphasise illness prevention and social inclusion [Rae Walker, editorial in AJPH, volume 14, issue 1, page 7].

Primary health care is a vital and essential component of effective health systems, and it requires a body of knowledge and evidence to match its diversity and complexity. Through the contributions of authors, the hard work of the Editorial Panel and the ongoing support of the Editorial Board, the AJPH continues to contribute to building that body of knowledge. The AJPH remains an important outlet for quality research focused on comprehensive interdisciplinary primary health care.

Professor Virginia Lewis, current Editor-in-Chief of AJPH, Research Chair in Community Health, La Trobe University

On behalf of and with thanks to past Editors-in-Chief: Heather Gardner, Hal Swerissen, Rae Walker, Libby Kalucy and Mandy Kenny, and long-serving Executive Officer, Jenny Macmillan

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.