Journal Looks to Improve Evidence Based Medicine

As evidence-based medicine (EBM) has grown over the past few decades, so has criticism of this new method of approaching medical problems. That kind of debate has generated an issue of Perspectives of Biology and Medicine focused on the discussion among medical professionals. The journal is published by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

Evidence-based medicine calls for using the best evidence in literature for the best care of a patient instead of simply relying on the advice of senior physicians. Critics point to biases in clinical trials as well as abandoning the knowledge of the mechanisms of disease for this new paradigm.

Papers in the journal focus on the hierarchy of evidence, problems with the current “evidence base,” EBM influence beyond internal medicine and the relationship between evidence and both health policy and clinical practice.

The issue (Volume 52, Issue 2) marks the second time the journal addressed EBM topics. Perspectives dedicated a collection of articles in 2005 on the subject. The journal’s editors say the debate comes at a very important time for healthcare in the United States.

“It is very interesting that much of the work analyzing EBM in depth comes from Canadian institutions,” writes Perspectives editors Alan N. Schecter and Robert L. Perlman in an introduction to the issue. “The United Kingdom has also been particularly active in these discussions.

“As the United States again begins an intense discussion of the organization of its health care system, it too will need to wrestle more fully with the strengths and weaknesses of the current EBM paradigm.”

The EBM issue was guest edited by philosophy professors Maya J. Goldenberg, Kirstin Borgerson, and Robyn Bluhm. Goldenberg teaches at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Borgerson is on faculty at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, and Bluhm teaches at Old Dominion University in Virginia.

The trio says that EBM has evolved so that one set of experts does the research which informs younger clinicians instead of the new physicians doing the research themselves.

“The newest form of EBM is in need of independent evaluation,” they write. “We believe the time is right to provide this kind of thoughtful scrutiny.”

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