Enduring Change Happens One Step at a Time—My Time as Editor of JAMA Internal Medicine

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When I took the helm of JAMA Internal Medicine in 2009, I had a good idea of the path, if not a destination, for the journal. I wanted to strengthen evidence-based medicine, draw greater attention to unnecessary procedures, examine “conventional wisdom” with a critical eye, increase awareness of the sometimes worrisome incentive structures in the health care system, and provide valuable information (and a voice) to the most important constituency in medicine—the patients. My editorial guidance, in short, was much like my philosophy in clinical practice: if a procedure or therapy does not extend life or improve the quality of life, what is its value? We should endeavor to find evidence to support health care before recommending it for patients. This principle, handed down by my influential mentor when I was a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania, John Eisenberg,1 has been foundational to my career as a cardiologist, researcher, government adviser, and editor.

To those ends, shortly after I became Editor, we launched our Less Is More series to highlight occasions when harms outweigh benefits in health care. This series led to much important work and conversations, in our pages and worldwide, and showed—using hard evidence—that less health care sometimes can be better for the patient.

We also gave space to findings and observations about the current health care system and medicine that are often overlooked. The publication of the Top 5 lists from the National Physicians Association in 2011,2 for example, laid the foundation for the American Board of Internal Medicine’s Choosing Wisely campaign. The important policy changes discussed in our pages have been vital to the conversations as the health care system is transformed with the influence of Sharon Inouye and her team, under the guidance of John Eisenberg at Penn Medicine, Wharton and LDI: aprofile of one of the true greats of health services research. University of Pennsylvania. October 2, 2017. Accessed May 23, 2023. https://ldi.upenn.edu/our-work/research-updates/beyond-john-of-ahrq-john-eisenberg-at-penn-medicine-wharton-and-ldi/

The publication of our articles on inferior vena cava filters,3,4 statins,5,6 and others have helped protect many individuals in the US from preventable harms.

Our editorial fellows program and Teachable Moments fellowship have allowed JAMA Internal Medicine editors to train the next generation of editors, and we are pleased to see other journals launching similar programs. It is an incredible benefit to work with the authors and the JAMA Internal Medicine team to present, in a manner that is easy to understand and implement, new scientific ideas that will improve medical practice. I am proud of so many accomplishments of this journal, including the careers we helped launch and boost after publication of authors’ important work.

I can state unequivocally that for nearly 15 years I have looked forward to every editors’ call; I have learned so much every Monday morning during our freewheeling manuscript discussions. I value the input of every person on our team, from the editorial fellows to the senior editors (many of whom started with me in 2009), as well as our Editorial Manager Marian Weidner and the many Chicago-based members of our editorial team. The most personally rewarding part of my job has been working with a truly brilliant, thoughtful, and fun group of editors and statistical consultants.

Regardless of what destination JAMA Internal Medicine will reach, the journey for me has been one of the most meaningful and rewarding endeavors of my professional life. I eagerly look forward to the journal’s continued influence as an agent of improvement in health care for all of us. I am confident that under the guidance of Sharon Inouye and her team, JAMA Internal Medicine is in excellent hands to continue its path.

