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American Academy of Family Physicians
Foundation

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FAMILY MEDICINE WORKING PARTY

The earliest evidence of an attempt to convene a group of family practice organizations took place in 1975. Edward W. Ciriacy, MD, then President of STFM, sent an invitation to the Presidents of the AAFP, ABFP (the American Board of Family Practice, now the ABFM), and the FHFA (Family Health Foundation of America; now known as the AAFP Foundation), and the Chairman of the Section Council on Family and General Practice of the AMA. He suggested the creation of a new organization, “a Council of Family Practice Societies.” Its stated purpose was to serve as a “useful means of exchanging information” and to help organizations “achieve more efficient utilization of our resources.” The FHFA and AAFP ultimately did not agree to create an organization; interestingly however, this effort was never given credit as being the initial impetus behind the creation of the Working Party.

The beginnings of the Working Party itself can be traced back to the creation of an “Ad Hoc Planning Committee for Liaison Conference of Family Practice Organizations” by the FHFA in December of 1977. This committee was appointed by then-FHFA President Julius Michaelson, MD, pursuant to an action taken by the Foundation’s Board of Trustees on October 11, 1977, which directed that a conference be held “to cement relations among the four family practice organizations: The Family Health Foundation of America, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Board of Family Practice] and the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine.”

On December 29, 1977, the Ad Hoc Planning Committee met in Phoenix and agreed on the importance of holding such a conference of representatives from the four organizations, to be sponsored by the FHFA. This conference, subsequently known as the “Family Practice Retreat,” was held from March 31-April 2, 1978 in Scottsdale, Arizona, and was the first formal meeting of representatives between the major Family Medicine organizations. A total of sixteen participants from the four organizations attended. The stated objectives of the conference were “(1) to improve communication, (2) to delineate areas of responsibility—both those common and those unique to each organization, (3) to enhance cooperation and (4) to avoid duplication of effort.”

During the course of that first meeting, the participants identified five broad areas of special concern:

- (1) On-site survey and evaluation mechanism of family practice residency programs;
- (2) In-training Assessment;
- (3) Faculty Development;

- (4) Undergraduate Curriculum; and
- (5) Funding Base for Residency Programs.

The four organizations agreed that these areas deserved further study, and that a “joint planning committee” be established to accomplish this. On September 26, 1978, a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the FHFA was held to discuss the results of the retreat. At that meeting, FHFA Trustee Dr. Edward J. Kowalewski successfully moved that the FHFA sponsor “a joint working party” to follow up on the results of the retreat on an annual basis, and from this, the “Working Party” was born.

On March 24-25, 1979, the FHFA convened and coordinated the first meeting of the “Family Practice Working Party” in Kansas City. Attendees were as follows:

AAFP:	W. Jack Stelmach, MD and Willis J. Irvine, MD
ABFP:	James G. Price, MD and Nicholas J. Pisacano, MD
STFM:	William J. Kane, MD and L. Robert Martin, MD
FHFA:	B. Leslie Huffman, Jr., MD and Herbert A. Holden, MD
Convener & Coordinator:	Julius Michaelson, MD, FHFA President
Special Resources & Liaison Counsel:	Thomas A. Nicholas, MD (standing in for Thomas L. Stern, MD who was ill)
Staff Assistance:	Charlotte Neilan, FHFA Secretary Judy Christopher, AAFP Administrative Assistant
Observer:	Ann Hyde, STFM Executive Director

One of the earliest tangible outcomes of the Working Party meetings was a position paper entitled “The Medical Education Accreditation System: A Working Paper,” distributed in 1980. Developed by Thomas L. Stern, MD, at the request of the Working Party, this document was utilized as background for a position paper that Dr. Stern wrote with a subcommittee of the CMSS.

Today, the Family Medicine Working Party continues to pursue the same four goals which its founders first set forth back in 1978, according to AAFP Vice President for Professional Activities Dr. Daniel J. Ostergaard. Dr. Ostergaard, then one of only two physicians on staff at the Academy, was frequently drawn into the early discussions of the Working Party, and attended many of its early meetings. As Dr. Ostergaard recalls, the early meetings of the Working Party served to “give a ‘heads up’ to each organization in an informal setting, with the understanding that organizational consideration would follow.” The initial meetings of the group were very informal in nature, with participants preferring to engage in conversation while seated in easy chairs in hotel suites instead of holding more formal sessions in conference rooms.

Since 1981, the Working Party has met biannually and has also expanded its membership to include three other organizations within the specialty: the Association of Departments of Family Medicine (ADFM), which joined in 1981; the Association of Family Practice

[now Family Medicine] Residency Directors (AFMRD), which joined in 1990; and the North American Primary Care Research Group (NAPCRG), which joined the Working Party in 1995.

Although the early meetings were chaired by the FHFA, beginning in 1989 the members of the Working Party established a rotational system for chairing and hosting the meetings, and this system has continued in place ever since.