

Trainees' forum

Journal clubs

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We were interested to read J. J. Hutchinson and A. Puranik (1992) on journal clubs at St Edward's Hospital, and would like to share our experience of running journal clubs in Sheffield. As stated, the College does not provide guidelines on the format of journal clubs, but they do provide a suggested reading list. While this contains interesting and relevant papers, it does not provide a good basis for a journal club programme.

In Sheffield, over the past six years a more active and self-determining journal club has developed with a group of registrars and senior registrars selecting well in advance the papers to be discussed, and circulating this list at six monthly intervals. We have also devised guidelines on presentation of papers intended to circumvent the problems that bedevil many journal clubs; lack of preparation and rote reading of the paper.

Our journal club has become an important focus of educational discussion and social interaction for junior psychiatrists. This has produced a sense of cohesion among successive cohorts of trainees, and an intellectually stimulating atmosphere conducive to the acquisition of knowledge. We do not think that the contribution of good journal clubs to the morale of junior doctors can be overstated.

We present our guidelines for the presentation of papers at the journal club.

Journal clubs – Guidelines for presentation of papers from the Sheffield & North Trent Rotation

The journal club provides a forum for discussing psychiatric research and current opinion within a relatively informal atmosphere. It is open to anyone to attend, but the trainee should note that it is a requirement for entrance to the MRCPsych examinations that a candidate attends a minimum of 30 per year.

Format

A simple recitation of the paper presented is unsatisfactory. It creates an atmosphere of boredom

and provides neither an educative account of the literature on the subject in question, nor an assessment of the paper's place within that literature. It allows little opportunity for constructive contribution or discussion and must therefore be avoided.

The following is an attempt to clarify the task of presenters and enable them to establish a basis for an informed and interesting discussion on the subject of their paper.

1. What is the subject of the paper?
What is the current opinion on this subject?
Review the subject in a general psychiatric textbook and obtain some other papers on the same subject.
Present an overall review of the current received opinion.
2. Describe the rationale for the paper:
replication of previous work?
new findings?
new theories?
challenging received wisdom?
reviewing the current literature?
adding another paper onto the cv?
3. Describe briefly the paper in question – analyse using the suggested guidelines (see Appendix):
present a distillation of this
assume people have read the paper (or are at least vaguely familiar with it).
4. Assess the effect of the paper:
does it change anything?
does it generate interesting new hypotheses?
does it offer evidence for or against received wisdom?
5. Assess the importance of this paper within the literature on the subject and attempt to assess its impact on clinical practice and future research directions. Would knowledge of this paper affect your answer on the subject in an examination for MRCPsych?

Appendix

Guidelines for analysis of research publications

The following headings serve as a methodological approach to the review of papers within the psychiatric literature.

Authors, funding and background

Who are the authors?

Have they published any previous work on this subject?

Where are they based?

Where is the funding from? (e.g. pharmaceutical company, state, charity, etc).

Title and abstract

Does the title adequately describe the research detailed in the paper? Are the main findings described in the abstract a fair and unbiased account of the main findings in the paper?

Introduction

Does the introduction concisely and logically describe the reason for mounting the research project, and is/are the hypothesis/es to be tested clearly stated?

Method

(a) *Subjects*. How are they selected? From which population? How does this affect the generality and representativeness of the study? Are specific inclusion and exclusion criteria stated?

(b) *Procedures*. Is enough detail given to permit a clear idea of any procedures undertaken? Would it be

possible to replicate the study from information given in the paper?

(c) *Measurement*. What instruments are used for measurement in the study? Are they of demonstrated reliability and validity? Is interrater reliability assessed? Have they been constructed for this study or have they been used in previous studies?

(d) *Ethical committee*. Has the research protocol been passed by an ethical committee? Do you agree that the study is ethical?

(e) *Statistics*. Have the statistical methods to be used been decided prior to data collection? Has the level of probability to be taken as significant been stated *a priori*?

Results

Are there any attempts to discuss the possibility of type 1 or type 2 errors?

Conclusion/discussion

Are the conclusions reasonable? Do the authors' interpretations of the data seem justified? Is previous work in the area studied mentioned/discussed? If the study seems methodologically flawed, how might the design be improved?

Reference

HUTCHINSON, J. A. & PURANIK, A. (1992) The journal clubs at St Edward's Hospital – a ten year audit: From the Keele Rotation, North Staffordshire. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **16**, 693–695.