



Opinion

Enhancing experiential education: Implementing and improving the journal club experience

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Abstract

Journal club has been recognized for years as an important learning tool for student pharmacists. Literature evaluation activities consistently prove to be one of the most challenging aspects of pharmacy education for students, residents, preceptors, and even seasoned pharmacists. As clinical pharmacy practice continues to expand through innovative new health care delivery models, pharmacists and students alike have expanded opportunities to learn new skills and information through the journal club process. For pharmacy preceptors, initiating and maintaining a regular and effective journal club can be a daunting addition to other job and precepting responsibilities. This article provides resources for implementing and improving journal club in the fast-paced pharmacy practice settings of today.

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Introduction

Journal club has been broadly defined as a gathering of individuals with the purpose of discussing and evaluating current biomedical literature.¹ It is a learning tool that is frequently employed throughout the medical professions, including pharmacy practice, in classrooms and practice sites. Journal clubs have repeatedly shown to promote the development of therapeutic knowledge, improve awareness of current research, and enhance critical thinking skills.¹ When implemented in practice settings as a component of experiential education, journal club promotes evidence-

based pharmacotherapy and has the potential to enhance patient-centered care.

As new practice models emerge with interprofessional education and interdisciplinary practice components, journal clubs need to adapt to the needs of students and practitioners. Seasoned sites may suffer from journal club fatigue, while new practitioners and practice sites may feel daunted by the thought of incorporating journal club into a busy schedule. Other barriers may stem from the lack of standardized procedures for holding journal club activities.² This article is designed to provide the techniques, resources, and guidance to implement or enhance journal club for pharmacy students in any practice setting.

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Mission drives results

Journal club is more than a meeting to discuss the latest “groundbreaking” research published. Journal clubs can be

more effective as a teaching tool when discussing research that is relevant to the practice site or the interests of a particular group. Meetings should provide a forum to discuss implications of a study for clinical practice, as well as allow participants to critique research design, biostatistics, or author conclusions of a study.^{3–6} As pharmacy educators evaluate journal club programs or design new programs for implementation, it is vital to remember that the mission drives results. Whether starting from scratch or making improvements, educators need to assess the mission of their journal club meetings. While some might be driven to enhance student knowledge of therapeutics, others might be designed to enhance communication skills, improve presentation abilities, or foster interprofessional education.⁷ Properly executed journal clubs can have a major impact on helping students transition from being the “knowledge absorber” in the classroom to the “critical thinker” in the clinic.⁷

Choose a champion

Every great cause has a champion. When the mission and purpose of journal club have been decided, it needs a champion, or facilitator, to see it through to fruition. The facilitator does not have to be a pharmacy preceptor but can be an academician, a site administrator, or a passionate provider. The journal club facilitator makes sure that all stakeholders are involved and that the mission of the meeting is achieved. Facilitators should serve as the presentation point-person, be involved in meeting planning, maintain a list of participants, ensure proper article selection, and delegate the logistical tasks prior to meetings. A complete outline of this is shown in the [Table](#).

Define the time

A vital factor to consider when planning a journal club or evaluating an existing program is the selection of a regular time and place. Interprofessional journal clubs can be difficult to maintain if a coordinated schedule is not communicated well between disciplines/departments. Meal times and periods of staffing overlap are generally ideal for a journal club, since they are less likely to interfere with patient care activities. Using a recurring schedule that is planned well into the future will also help ensure high attendance rates. Meeting or appointment e-mails should be delivered to participants who are expected to attend regularly, thus allowing the journal club facilitator to ensure that there will be sufficient space and deliverable materials (e.g., handouts and copies of the article). A convenient location—such as a central conference room or auditorium—and a consistent location encourage habit-forming behaviors for participants.

Finding the right articles

If the mission of a journal club is to enhance therapeutic knowledge and critical thinking skills, the discussion must be evidence driven. Evidence-based medicine (EBM) has been defined as “a systematic approach to clinical problem solving which allows the integration of the best available research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values.”⁸ As most students enter experiential education as knowledge seekers, learning experiences must help them integrate clinical evidence with data from research to make decisions in patient care. Choosing stimulating articles can help learners understand that the answers to clinical questions are not always found in a book. An engaging journal club meeting on a regular basis can help students develop their skills to optimize health outcomes through the integration of knowledge, experience, and the best interests of the patient.

Journal club facilitators should be involved in the article selection process. Ideal articles include those related to the practice site, hot topics in health care, or new therapies that may impact guidelines for patient care. Articles should reflect Patient-Oriented Evidence that Matters (POEMs), which address useful patient outcomes such as morbidity, mortality, and quality of life. POEMs should also possess valid data, free from errors or bias, which have the potential to influence practice decisions. Disease-Oriented Evidence (DOEs) includes articles describing preliminary research, pathophysiology or etiology of specific diseases.^{9–12} It may be worthwhile for the student to focus their efforts on identifying POEMs instead of DOEs to impart useful and practical knowledge with the potential to impact practice at their clinical site.

Table
Tasks for preparing a journal club presentation

Responsible party ^a	Task
Facilitator	Journal club “point-person” Ensure presentation structure is maintained Lead journal club presentation discussion Delegate responsibilities to other participants
Planner	Select/adjust of time and/or place Create appointment/meeting reminders Create recurring events for calendar Manage participant RSVP Prepare presentation deliverables
Presenter	Select and receive approval for journal article Prepare discussion and evaluation of article Article and rubric distribution to participants Deliver presentation Provide follow-up to questions unanswered
Other participants	Read/review journal article prior to presentation Evaluate presenter using provided tool

^a Responsible parties may perform the tasks of other responsible parties (e.g., the presenter may serve as the planner and/or the facilitator).

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