

Running a journal club

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Abstract

This article outlines elements in a workshop on running a journal club. The session took place during the EAHIL+ ICAHIS+ICLC workshop in Edinburgh, in June 2015. The article includes a summary of advice and issues raised by workshop participants, and a bibliography of articles about journal clubs in the library and the healthcare sectors.

Key words: journal clubs; evidence-based practice; continuing professional development.

The aim of this workshop session was to provide insight into the practicalities and issues concerned with running or supporting a journal club. The workshop consisted of an introduction, a short journal club session, and participant discussion in small groups.

A journal club is formed in order for the journal club members to meet periodically and discuss items from the literature, usually research articles. In the healthcare context, journal clubs have been identified as “a mechanism by which healthcare professionals can update their knowledge, promote critical thinking and research, assess the validity and applicability of the literature, improve skills in critical appraisal, increase the use of literature in clinical practice and to influence changes in care practices” (1).

Library and information professionals may run journal clubs for themselves, to discuss articles relevant to their own professional development. They may also support journal clubs in their institution which are organised primarily for the benefit of other employee groups e.g. nurses or clinicians. To accompany the workshop we provided a bibliography of articles in both these areas (i.e. librarian-focused journal clubs and journal clubs for healthcare professionals). We also listed some librarian websites related to journal clubs, including ones which hosted journal clubs and ones which had material to support journal clubs: these links are available at <http://infolitjournalclub.blogspot.co.uk/>

2015/08/links-concerning-journal-clubs.html.

In the introduction to the workshop we identified that there were the issues of, firstly, managing the journal club (i.e. starting it up and keeping it going) and, secondly, of facilitating the journal club sessions themselves. The literature tends to focus more on the former: in terms of the latter, one can turn to articles about facilitating small group discussion, face to face or online. For example Rovai (2) summarises research into facilitating online discussion in a formal education context.

The article (3) which we had chosen for the short journal club discussion was written by a librarian who supported a number of online journal clubs for groups of nurses in her workplace (a hospital in the United States). She aimed to assess the librarian's role and determine the impact of librarian participation in the journal clubs. We introduced the article with slides outlining context, aims, methods, and results and presented some questions for discussion by participants.

As well as critiquing the article, the ensuing discussion raised some interesting issues, for example: do we always need to discuss methodologically sound articles, or could articles with methodology that was open to criticism stimulate important discussion around the perceived problems.

Following on from the discussion, participants worked in groups to share tips about journal clubs (some participants already had a good deal of

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experience, whilst others were new to them). Tips included:

- define your purpose;
- keep your aims clear;
- don't assume everyone has read the article;
- be loud and clear;
- provide beer! (as an incentive to attend, as suggested by Mattingly (4));
- summarise the article;
- start with a comment round;
- try to make it fun every now and then;
- make sure the senior staff support and attend;
- finalise the comments on an article in a letter to the editor!

Participants noted that journal clubs could be a great opportunity for librarians to increase the relationship between librarians and healthcare workers and get to know patrons' problems. It could make librarians' competences more visible, including the importance of searching. However, running it with health professionals could be challenging, and maintaining the club required motivation and effort.

In terms of the medium for the journal club, some participants mentioned online learning applications such as Abode Connect and Blackboard Collaborate, and others thought a blended approach could be effective: a "B-journal club".

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