

Neurosurgical training

The importance of the journal club for neurosurgical trainees

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Summary The enormous volume of published literature in the field of neurosurgery represents an impossible task for the trainee or consultant neurosurgeon to digest. The aim of this paper is to review the views of current accredited trainees as to how best achieve the goals of information acquisition in combination with a heavy clinical workload. The views of 22 accredited trainees in the field of neurosurgery in Australia and New Zealand are reviewed. The recommendations from this study are that journal clubs are paramount to neurosurgical training for acquisition of new information, the frequency of meetings should be monthly and papers discussed should be those that impact significantly on management and standard of care and be founded on evidence-based medicine criteria.

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INTRODUCTION

The enormous volume of published literature in the field of neurosurgery and the neuroscience's represents an impossible task for the trainee or consultant neurosurgeon to digest. The question of which journal's to read is common place with no one right answer. The aim of this paper is to review the views of current accredited trainees as to how best achieve the goals of information acquisition in combination with a heavy clinical workload.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire was devised and sent to 23 accredited neurosurgical trainees to examine various questions including: regularity of reading journals, which journals are regularly reviewed, the benefits of journal clubs, how often should a journal club be held and views on time available to read journals. All data were collected and investigated by the author.

RESULTS

Twenty-two of twenty-three questionnaires were returned for analysis. Of the 22 there were 4 females and 18 males. Twenty out of 22 respondents (91%) agreed with the statement that "there are too many journals to review in the time available in a standard training schedule." Nineteen respondents (86%) attempted to regularly read journals. The commonly read journals are outlined in Fig. 1. The most widely read publication was the *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience* with 17 respondents (77%), followed by *Journal of Neurosurgery* with 16 (72%) respondents and *Neurosurgery* with 15 (68%). On the specific question of whether a journal club setting provides an opportunity to review important papers and is therefore of benefit, 91% of respondents (20/22) agreed. The question of how often should

literature be reviewed was asked. Options provided included weekly, monthly, tri-annually or not at all. The option that was considered most valuable by 68% of respondents (15/22) was monthly meetings, followed by weekly and tri-annual (see Fig. 2).

In the comments section of the questionnaire, 4 trainees recommended that papers discussed should be confined to those that change patient management or standard of care and be based on evidence-based medicine criteria.

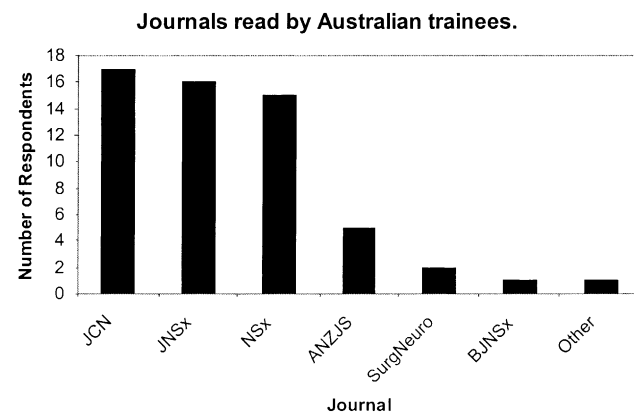


Fig. 1 Journals regularly read by Australian trainees. JCN, Journal of Clinical Neuroscience; JNSx, Journal of Neurosurgery; NSx, Neurosurgery; ANZJS, Australian New Zealand Journal of Surgery; SurgNeuro, Surgical Neurology; BJNSx, British Journal of Neurosurgery.

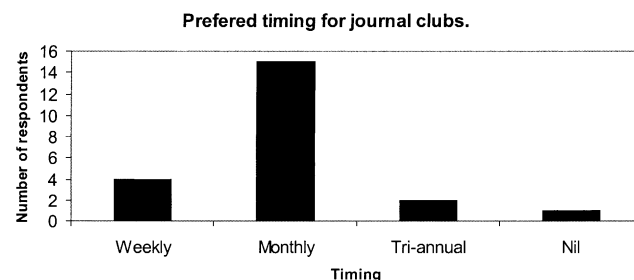


Fig. 2 How often should journal clubs be run?

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DISCUSSION

The overall view held by most trainees is that the volume of literature is disproportionate to the time and resources available to digest the information. Most trainees agreed that journal clubs are an integral method to combat the problem of literature saturation and provide a platform to discuss new information that may change our management and standard of care. The most popular journal read by Australian and New Zealand trainees was *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience*, which may reflect the availability of this journal to trainees. Interestingly no trainees regularly read *Spine*, the premier journal for diseases and surgery of the spine, despite this journal being affiliated with the Australian Spine Society. The majority of trainees agreed that monthly journal clubs provided adequate exposure to meet and discuss the literature.

A survey of program directors of a general surgical residencies in the USA concluded that once monthly meetings were of benefit and learning literature review skills and providing training in research education as other top priorities.¹ Traditionally journal clubs provided a forum to learn presentation skills,² however, the new approach to teaching and learning in journal clubs, focusing

on literature acquisition and critical appraisal skills is now the priority. This approach will enable trainees to use journal clubs for personal professional development as well as for application of new knowledge in clinical medicine to improve patients' outcomes.^{1,2}

In conclusion, the recommendations that can be made from this study include:

- Journal clubs are paramount to neurosurgical training for acquisition of new information.
- The frequency of meetings should be monthly.
- Articles discussed should be those that impact significantly on management and standard of care and be founded on evidence-based medicine criteria.

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