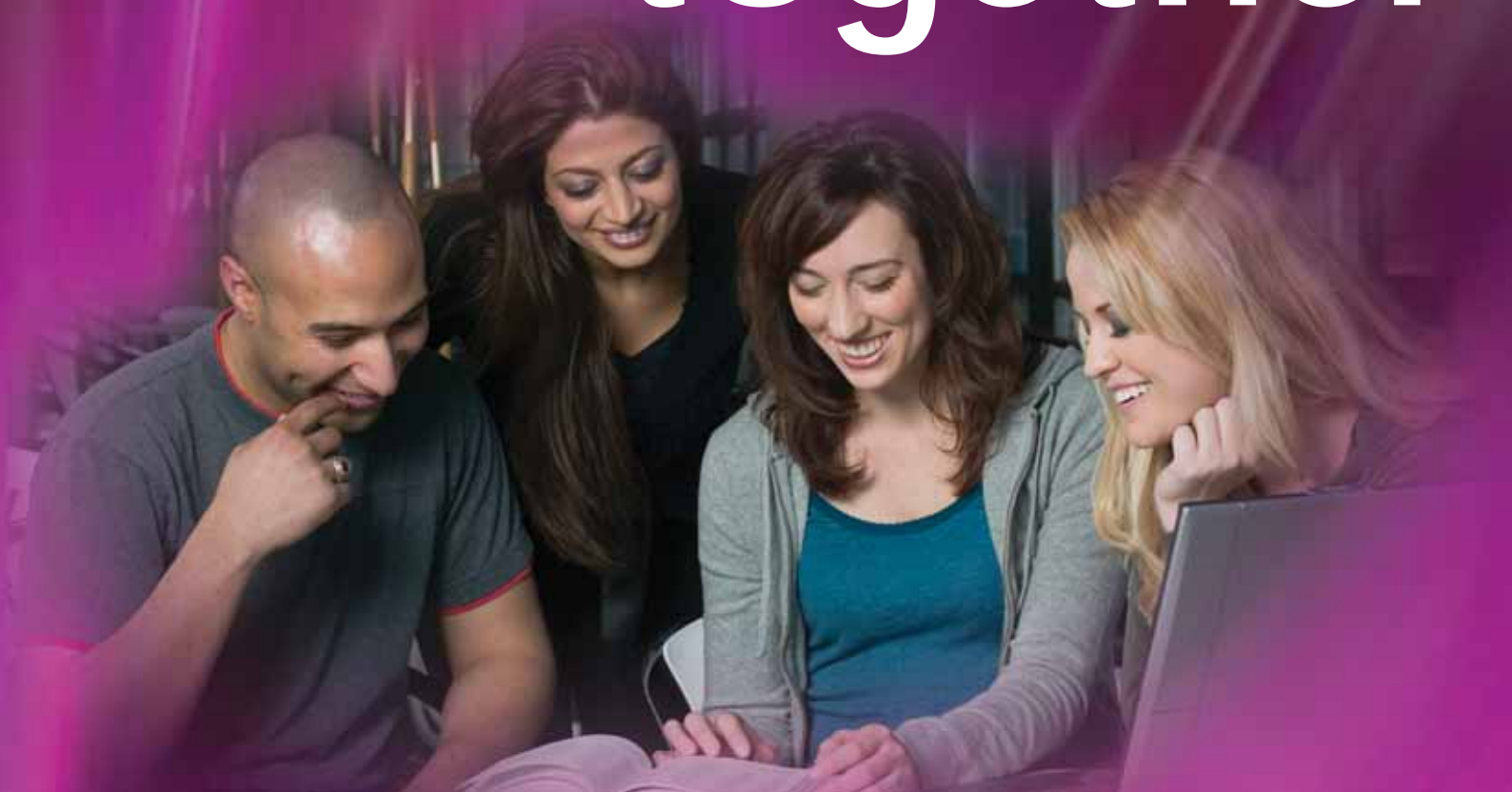


# Clubbing together



**Sheila Bull outlines how journal clubs can be a very effective form of CPD.**

## **Introduction**

In order to be effective, a continuing professional development (CPD) strategy needs to encourage creative and empowering activities that enable the practitioner to challenge and then seek to change (or support) current methods of working. Knowledge of the positive results of these activities completes the cycle of review and thereby reinforcement of the ethos of CPD is achieved.

All healthcare workers are aware of the importance of evidence-based practice but, for a number of reasons, some professionals will operate at least partially within a research 'vacuum'. Often this is due to time and organisational constraints rather than a lack of interest or the will to promote practice development. Help is needed to 'bridge this gap' between theory and practice and thus promote professional identity, purpose and direction.

As part of a range of CPD activities, radiographers can choose to demonstrate that they are actively engaging with research 'outputs' such as peer reviewed journal and trade magazine articles. Active engagement means that practitioners will need to show that they have read selected and relevant articles in order to benefit themselves and the service. Whilst radiographers can certainly pursue this activity on their own, working together within a group provides an additional

motivational and operational boost.

A *journal club* can be defined as a group of individuals who meet regularly to review, discuss and critically evaluate relevant articles from magazine and peer review journals. They originated with the aim of appraising *current literature relevant to practice*; the focus being on recent valid and reliable peer reviewed research articles. However, trade or professional magazines also publish articles of substantial content that are widely read and deemed influential. There is no reason why these documents, plus official and government reports (such as White Papers) shouldn't also be studied.

Journal clubs should be relatively easy to set up. They are inexpensive, versatile and can be developed across services and across multidisciplinary teams with members who have a range of research skills and experience. It is possible for an individual to participate in a journal club regardless of his or her level of skill and the club can be graded according to the participants' confidence and experience.

It is important to understand that a number of interventions (not just journal clubs) are needed to increase the use of research findings. However, the journal club:

- ◆ Is essentially an educational tool, providing deeper insight into professional practice
- ◆ Gives members an update of the literature and of the evidence base
- ◆ May help with acquisition of skills in appraising and critiquing research
- ◆ Can be used to prompt questions in problem based learning (PBL)
- ◆ Facilitates greater awareness of research and encourages a sense of 'ownership' of the profession. Both of these are empowering and help professionals sense that they are not operating in a 'passive' mode.

### Aims, strategy and membership

At the outset, decide *what the club is for, what you think it will achieve* and *who the members will be*. Membership could be single or multi-disciplinary but an equally important consideration is whether the members will be motivated to read through the given documents within an agreed time frame.

There will need to be a strategy for 'what to do' with the new knowledge acquired: the discussion and the results. This will be influenced by the topics selected. In addition, there should be an action plan or strategy to develop the club. Remember that dissemination of feedback from the club's achievements is important to retain membership and overall management support.

### The practicalities – what to do

The first consideration is whether organisational and time constraints will allow the club to function. Some line managers are not prepared to find time for meetings or they are unwilling to change established practice even when the club considers that they have found a more effective alternative. Then the aims, format, frequency, structure, membership and leadership need to be decided for each meeting.

Article selection should take place at least three weeks before the scheduled discussions. This could be a single article or several articles related to a single topic. Distribute them at least two weeks before the meeting and encourage participants to read them in preparation for the discussion.

Different techniques can be used to optimise participation and interest within each session. Different seating arrangements can be tried but it may be most effective to seat members in a circle in order

to promote eye contact and interactions. One way to proceed is for discussion leaders to outline areas of emphasis and then initiate discussion. He or she should solicit comments from the audience to stimulate further discussion. The conference may then be tailored to meet goals and maintain participants' interest.

The leader may consider using a number of prompt questions distributed prior to the meeting as a means to encourage the participants to think about the areas of emphasis and formulate opinions for discussion.

### Keeping records for CPD

A logbook provides a means of documenting the growth and development of learning through journal clubs. Keeping records in this way encourages the documentation of reflective practice and may provide inspiration for further research. Logbooks can be completed on an individual or a group basis and can be used to document some or all of the following:

- ◆ Terminology, eg, new terms or references
- ◆ Research methods
- ◆ Writing styles
- ◆ Action points

In addition, and depending on the declared aims and objectives of the club, a written summary called a critically appraised topic (CAT) may be completed. Foster et al<sup>1</sup> have described a CAT as *a summary of the best evidence available which answers a clinical 'bottom line'*. More information is available about CATs from <http://www.cebm.net/?o=1023>

### Further club activities

- ◆ **Challenging textbooks:** healthcare professionals often rely on textbooks for established facts. Journal club analysis of the actual articles on which these presumed facts are based may be a worthwhile exercise that allows participants to see whether they agree with accepted dogma.
- ◆ **Improving critical analysis skills:** devoting a full session to a single peer reviewed research article allows a study to be examined in detail. This discussion should focus on the design of the study, the methods used and the appropriateness of the data analysis. This format may help participants when writing their own manuscripts.
- ◆ **Undertaking problem based learning (PBL):** excerpts from the paper to be reviewed are distributed with accompanying open-ended questions at the beginning of each session. Members must record their responses without outside consultation. Groups of four or five members are then formed to discuss and unify their responses. A representative provides an oral summary for each group following which a general discussion ensues.

### Evaluation of the club

Club members should fill in an evaluation form at the end of each session – Shearer<sup>2</sup> listed six such questions:

1. Was the topic and content of the article relevant to your practice?
2. Were your personal objectives met?
3. Was the discussion well organised?
4. Was there adequate time?
5. What suggestions do you have for the development of the journal club?
6. What suggestions do you have for future journal club topics?

### Lessons learnt

The following list is derived from suggestions for improving the function and results of journal clubs following personal experiences<sup>3</sup>,

reiterating some of the statements made above.

- ◆ A departmental meeting should be held at the outset to design an action plan to determine aims and objectives, evaluation procedures and barriers with solutions (see box below). There needs to be clear boundaries about what the group is about and what it is not.
- ◆ Articles selected should be relevant to group members' service development projects.
- ◆ Use a team approach to organisation and note keeping.
- ◆ Use a rota system to share responsibilities for finding and disseminating articles and club leadership.
- ◆ Develop an action plan to measure progress and provide clarity and focus for group members.

**Conclusion**

Journal clubs are one of a number of strategies for engaging actively with current research where there may be benefits to working in groups rather than on an individual basis. Radiographers may also find a journal club approach useful for critiquing statements in textbooks and undertaking problem based learning. The aim of these structured and documented activities is to help improve practice and thereby benefit patients and other service users.

**About the Author**

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References for this article are at:  
[www.sor.org/members/pubarchive/pub\\_search.htm](http://www.sor.org/members/pubarchive/pub_search.htm)

**CPD: Tell us what you think**



Would you like a journal club to be set up on the SoR website?

Answer this question and more at [www.sor.org/xxx](http://www.sor.org/xxx) xxxxx and help us to help you with your CPD.

**Barriers and solutions**

This table is extracted from Bannigan and Hooper's *How journal clubs can overcome barriers to research utilisation*<sup>3</sup> Permission for reproduction has been obtained from the copyright holders, publishers Mark Allen Group.

**A diagnostic analysis of possible barriers and solutions to setting up a journal club**

**Possible barriers**

Getting a critical mass

Supporting culture not in place, eg,

- a) permission from others
- b) clinical pressures

Personal issues, eg,

- a) do not currently read
- b) cannot justify the time
- c) fear and anxiety

Journal clubs have had a bad press

Resources, eg library access and training needs

**Practical solutions**

Use existing processes such as in-service training rather than adding to current workload. Galvanise enthusiasm through discussion with all staff to sell the idea and to develop journal club that fits in with their needs. Create an atmosphere of 'learning together'.

There needs to be clear support from management. Develop an action plan. Incorporate into in-service training so that it becomes part of mainstream activity. Support this activity with a clear rationale related to service and policy needs. Staff shortage and time are not an excuse because they are a perennial difficulty.

Identify baseline knowledge of the group. Self-discipline – stick with it. Having personal rules that develop into habits, e.g. devoting an hour a month to reading. Make sure this work is scheduled and do not let other activities encroach upon it. Work with others where possible.

Use a different name, eg, clinical action group. Be innovative, eg, use CATmaker (see <http://www.cebm.net/?o=1023> – a computer programme for conducting and recording journal club sessions – to ensure a lively learning experience and a record of learning). Evaluate to ensure journal club is achieving aims.

Think laterally about the availability of local resources, eg, sharing professional journals across disciplines. Use other people in your organisation who have skills in critical appraisal. Develop links with educators/researchers from local and higher education establishments. Keep a record (not just minutes) so that learning is logged and can be referred to in the future.