

REDISCOVERING THE VALUE OF THE JOURNAL CLUB

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The use of a “journal club” to promote the discussion and critique of research has been used for many years in medical education. The first record of a medical journal club was the one founded in 1875 by Sir William Osler, a physician with an interest in medical education. He originally described the journal club as facilitating the distribution of unaffordable periodicals, and later evolved it into a book and journal club that met over dinner to review the latest in medical research.¹ Regularly scheduled journal club meetings are part of many medical school education programs. While there are several reports of journal clubs in the nursing literature, nurses have not widely adopted the journal club as a format for continued education and critique of research.

Purpose of a Journal Club

A journal club has been defined as an educational meeting in which a group of individuals discuss current articles, providing a forum for a collective effort to keep up with the literature.^{2,3} There are many advantages of participating in a journal club, including keeping abreast of new knowledge, promoting awareness of current nursing research findings, learning to critique and appraise research, becoming familiar with the best current clinical research, and encouraging research utilization.^{4,5} The journal club also has been cited as a bridge between research and practice, fostering application of research to the clinical setting.⁶

Nursing research promotes a scientific basis for clinical nursing practice. Yet, many nurses are hesitant to read research, often citing uncertainty about how to critique research and difficulty with interpretation. Reading research and promoting understanding of the research process is important for translating research findings into clinical practice.

An issue of concern is that despite advances in research knowledge, nursing practice has not kept pace with implementing research into practice. This is especially important in critical care nursing, where advances in critical care medicine, technologies, and

pharmacotherapeutics are always evolving. Transferring research-based knowledge into practice is an essential element of ensuring that patient care is based on scientific principles. Evaluating research for utilization in clinical practice involves more than simply reading research.⁷ The critical review of clinical research relevant to critical care nursing practice is fundamental if we are to promote an evidence-based practice framework for nursing care.

This issue of the *American Journal of Critical Care* debuts a new feature, the *AJCC* Journal Club. Each issue of the journal will now feature an *AJCC* Journal Club article with a Web site link that provides questions and discussion points to stimulate a journal club discussion in which participants can evaluate new research and its applicability to clinical nursing practice. We encourage critical care nurses to use the *AJCC* Journal Club to assist them in critically analyzing research to promote a better understanding of the research process and to advocate evidence-based nursing practice.

How to Begin

The 6 steps to beginning a journal club at your school, hospital, or medical institution are simple:

1. Post and distribute copies of the research article and the journal club discussion questions to interested persons
2. Set up a convenient meeting time and location (eg, monthly)
3. Identify a facilitator for the meeting (initially, this could be a clinical educator, clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, nurse manager, or senior staff member, with journal club members then taking turns to lead subsequent journal club sessions)
4. Hold the journal club (encourage active participation of those attending by using the discussion questions)
5. Evaluate the journal club (eg, at the end of the session, gather feedback from participants). Determine how the next journal club meeting could be made more beneficial, eg, encourage more staff attendance, hold more than one session, tape-record the session for those unable to attend

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6. Schedule the next meeting, using the *AJCC* Journal Club article

Keys to a Successful Journal Club

The general purpose of a journal club is to facilitate the review of a specific research study and to discuss implications of the study for clinical practice. There are several keys to a successful journal club: promoting interest, attendance, and involvement; designating a session leader to start and facilitate discussion, which can help to ensure that the time spent at journal club meetings is productive; and scheduling the journal club meetings at a time and location that are convenient for interested persons to attend.

In critically analyzing published research, a number of issues may be discovered about a study that can affect acceptance of the findings for nursing practice. Some common research errors include broad-reaching conclusions that are drawn without testing an adequate sample, inappropriate study design, improper use of statistical tests, or misleading charts or tables. Research studies are evaluated not only for scientific merit, but also for their relevance to clinical nursing practice.

Many nurses subscribe to professional journals but have difficulty finding time to read them. A journal club offers the unique opportunity to promote the use of nursing literature for learning the process of reading and critiquing research as well as for assimilating information for change in clinical practice.⁸

The value of a journal club is that it can promote a better understanding of the research process and an improved ability to critically appraise research. In introducing the *AJCC* Journal Club, we encourage the readership to become involved in a journal club as a way of

better understanding and using research for possible utilization in clinical nursing practice.

Each issue of the American Journal of Critical Care will now feature an AJCC Journal Club article followed by a list of discussion points to stimulate a journal club discussion in which participants can evaluate new research and its applicability to clinical nursing practice. This issue's Journal Club article begins on page 415, and the discussion points can be found on page 429. Go to www.ajconline.org and click on Journal Club to access each issue's AJCC Journal Club article and its discussion points online. Also included on the Web site are "Guidelines for Critiquing Research," a helpful list of common questions used to guide a research critique, and "Glossary of Research Terms," a list of commonly used terms and their definitions. "Guidelines for Critiquing Research" and "Glossary of Research Terms" can also be accessed through AACN Fax on Demand by calling 800-222-6329; ask for item #4200 and item #4201, respectively.

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