‘How to’ set up a Journal Club

The following guide is suggested to be used as just that – a guide to help you to set up your own journal club. We all work in very different clinical settings and so what works well for one may not work in exactly the same way in another setting. The suggestions made in this guide have come from published articles and from our own experience and learning when running our own Journal Club. So use the guide and start a journal club in a format that works best for you! Remember, that we are still learning and so still allow our journal club to grow and develop as we learn... Yours can too and you may come up with an idea that could be worth letting us know about!

First things, first...

1. Why start a journal club?
   Firstly it would be a good idea to familiarise yourself with a definition of journal club and its intended purpose/benefits. These are displayed on the ‘About journal club’ page in the ‘Affiliates’ section on our website: [www.childnursepracticedevelopment.org.za](http://www.childnursepracticedevelopment.org.za)

2. Who should attend?
   Who do you want to be the members of your journal club? You can set up a journal club for any group of people but bear in mind that the focus and function of the club will be different depending on your members. Some ideas of possible journal club members:
   - Students (pre-registration or postgraduate level)
   - Nurses (This could be divided by grade, or speciality or working environment, or hospital-wide)
   - Multidisciplinary teams

   **Evidence:** Rich (2006) and St. Pierre (2005) found that by making membership of a journal club more diverse (including nurse managers, nursing officers, nurse educators and quality improvement staff), the discussion topics resulted in being wider and that any proposed resulting practice change could be heard, encouraged and supported immediately. This is certainly something we also found to be true.

3. Where and when would be best for your group?
   Decide on a suitable location, time and place and adhere to it strictly.
   - Date and time - Investigate when would be the best time for your intended members to attend – work around their normal work commitments. Then agree on a time that can always remain the same, for example, the last Monday of each month at 11am.
   - Length and frequency of meeting – Once a month for an hour is a realistic aim in terms of preparation, concentration and other work commitments.
   - Location – Again, this may take some research. Look for a place that is convenient for people to attend and that feels informal and is likely to encourage conversation. Ideally it should not be a place that it associated with other less favoured events.
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- Send out reminders – we would strongly suggest that 1 week before the journal club is due to meet, you send out a reminder of the date, time and place and if possible the topic of the journal to be presented and discussed. This could even be repeated the day before, or on the day of the journal club as well – this enables people to arrange their work schedules to enable them to be present.

4. How will you plan your discussion?
Suggestions as to the design of a journal club are plentiful with the main ones being that in each meeting you either present and discuss:
- One article
- Multiple articles covering one topic
- One journal, which will contain articles on many topics. Rich (2006)

We would propose that when starting a journal club it is very important to ensure that the concept is non-threatening and not overwhelming to people who may have never before read an article or seen a journal. Keeping this in mind, our suggestion would be that you discuss one article at each meeting.

**Evidence:** Who selects the article? The literature recommends that the leader should choose the articles themselves, especially when first setting up a journal club (Mallick, M (2008) and Deenadayalan et al. (2008)). This is something we have learnt the long way to do and would highly recommend you follow. However, if you want the members to choose, then it could be wise to give them a list of journals from which the article is required to come.

You could decide to focus the articles. Some ideas for focus topics are:
- Research articles
- Nursing skills-related topics
- Speciality-related topics such as cardiac nursing or surgical nursing
- Leadership
- Local authorship
- Teaching topics if working with students

5. Who should lead and who should present?
Someone has to take leadership of a journal club. This is crucial to its success. That person will need to be committed, genuinely interested in the idea and have the time to do sufficient preparation to ensure that it continues to be effective. Since you are reading this – that person may be you.

Once you have a leader(s), it is important to formalise their role and the involvement they have in each meeting:
- The leader will be responsible for scheduling each meeting and disseminating the article beforehand (see below).

But who will present at the meeting? Your options are:
- The leader presents the article and coordinates the following discussion.
- The leader asks other members to present, but still coordinates the discussion. The leader may assist the presenter with their preparation.
- The leader asks other members to present and coordinate discussion.

To ensure an effective journal club, we would suggest that the leader(s) present and coordinate, at least at first. This could evolve over time by members starting to suggest possible articles for review and then maybe presenting articles themselves. One possible exception to this may be if you are
planning to start a journal club with students, since there can be huge benefits to all aspects of their studies if they begin by presenting the articles (you could still choose the articles for them).

If asking someone else to present an article, it may be helpful to guide them with the structure of their presentation. One possibility is to follow the format: Introduction, Literature review, Research question, Method, Sampling, Data Collection, Results, Discussion, Limitations of the study, Conclusion.

6. How should you structure the meeting?
In the first meeting, you may want to start by collectively defining your journal club and setting out what everyone hopes to gain from it. You could also start by examining some articles about journal clubs.

Evidence: Structure of subsequent meetings – it is suggested by many authors that a copy of the article to be reviewed should be made known and available to the members of the club prior to the meeting (maybe a week ahead). This allows them to make themselves familiar with the article and consider any discussion points.

The meeting would start with the presenter giving a summary of the article using PowerPoint and then followed by a coordinated discussion.

Within the discussion, depending on the needs of the club, you may want to conduct a review the research. However, without prior knowledge of research methods, reviewing the literature may be a little difficult, and even with knowledge, supplying a list of research review questions to consider ahead of time may enable the discussion to have a better flow.

The discussion should always include a component of reflection. St. Pierre (2005, p.391) promotes the use two questions ‘What is the relevance of this article to our practice?’ and ‘Should we change practice and policies based in this evidence?’ for the bulk of the discussion time whereas Denehy (2004, p.188) states that considering the “so what” question – ‘So what does this mean for me and my practice?’ is a good tool to use to summarise the journal club discussion.

So happy Journal Clubbing! We hope the guide helps and if you want any other advice then feel free to get in touch via our contacts page or by emailing us on info@childnursepracticedevelopment.co.za

References