

Editorial

SHOULD A JOURNAL BE ENTERTAINING?



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

Recently, I gave a presentation to the American Association of Dental Editors about the role of peer-reviewed journals in guiding clinical decision making. Speaking to a former president of CDA well before the presentation, I told him the nature of the talk I was preparing. His comment was “that’s going to be a very short presentation, John.”

He had a point. The literature I consulted indicated that peer-reviewed literature has little impact on clinical decision making. The 2 main bodies of literature that brought me to this conclusion related to the uptake of clinical practice guidelines by physicians and the types of information that influence their prescribing habits.

A purely educational approach for the publication and dissemination of guidelines doesn’t seem to be very effective. According to a 1999 publication called *Getting Evidence into Practice* (see <http://www.cda-adc.ca/>

[jcda/vol-70/issue-11/735.html](http://www.cda-adc.ca/jcda/vol-70/issue-11/735.html)), other strategies need to complement the dissemination of guidelines if clinicians’ behaviour is to change. One well-documented example of physician behaviour change is the decision to prescribe a newly introduced medication. Here again, the peer-reviewed literature is among the least important sources of information influencing the decision to prescribe.

Many clinicians gain awareness about a new drug through pharmaceutical industry publications or through face-to-face contact with a company representative. Once awareness is raised about the new drug, a practitioner often experiments to see if the new medication suits patients’ needs. The endorsement of the drug by a respected specialist colleague is another factor that prompts a physician to actually prescribe the newly introduced preparation. In my opinion, this process is similar to how we find out about and decide to use new dental materials.

Can a publication like ours hope to influence your clinical decision making and help you in your quest to make the best decisions in the interest of your patients? With regard to clinical matters, we will have to content ourselves with raising your awareness about relevant topics. We can only achieve this if we present timely, credible and pertinent material in an attractive and, dare I say, entertaining manner.

In the desire to present a serious and dignified professional air, *JCDA* and other journals have often ended up more dull than interesting; a chore to read rather than fun to pick up. I believe we have to make every effort to create a new *JCDA* that will meet certain goals, but will still grab readers’ attention. And what are the primary goals we strive to reach?

First and foremost, I believe that our role is to produce a community-

building publication for dentists. The paper version of *JCDA* should answer the questions being asked by Canadian dentists. With each edition, you should be able to learn something interesting and new, that is also relevant to your professional life. I see the paper version evolving into the “clinician’s” edition, with the electronic version becoming the more “academic” edition. Our combined print and electronic publication should reflect well on CDA and the Canadian dental profession, and every Canadian dentist should have reason to be proud to support *JCDA*.

How can you support a newly invigorated *JCDA*? I believe you can do so through CDA membership or by subscribing to *JCDA*. You can help develop the publication by contributing as an author or reviewer, or as an engaged reader who suggests questions for us to answer, or one who expresses opinions through our letters section. I think of *JCDA* as a “campfire” for dentists to gather around and swap stories. While we all enjoy the heat and the fellowship that comes with the campfire, we need a critical mass of people to throw logs on the fire or it will die.

Taking time to reflect, I feel very humble recalling the wonderful contributions that so many people have made to develop *JCDA* further in 2004. I heartily thank our colleagues from Canada, and increasingly from around the world, who helped us so generously this year. I wish these authors, reviewers, advisors and all our readers a very happy and peaceful holiday season. I look forward to working with you in 2005 to create an even more enjoyable and interesting publication.

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