

Reading on the Job

Journal clubs are commonly used in hospitals to provide nurses with an opportunity to read and discuss current literature. This is a worthy goal and one that we would like to encourage and facilitate. Beginning with this issue, we will choose one article and provide specific ideas for discussion questions. Actually, every article in every issue would potentially be great for journal club discussion, but we will highlight just one to draw your attention to the possibilities. We will start with articles that have obvious clinical relevance, but do not be surprised if we occasionally suggest a research report for your consideration. Our hope is that introducing a journal club activity on your unit, be it inpatient or outpatient, will provide your staff with an opportunity to share knowledge and ideas, become better consumers of professional literature, encourage professional reading, and demonstrate ways in which up-to-date nursing knowledge can be incorporated into practice.

If you already have a journal club activity on your unit, we hope that this will support your activities in a meaningful way. Please drop us a line and let us know what works for you and how you increase the usefulness of the activity for your nurses. We will share some of those ideas with other readers. If you have not yet established a journal club on your unit, here are some points to consider.


1. Post the article to be discussed ahead of time, and allow enough time for participants to read the material. Allotting time to read at work would be wonderful, but we all know that is not practical. Making time to read your nursing journal is a pro-

fessional obligation. RNs should be able to find the time to read material outside the work setting if given some notice.

2. Schedule the journal club at a time and frequency that makes sense to your particular setting. A number of nurses who have done this have suggested that lunchtime seems to be the best option, but perhaps taking an hour after work would be the group's preference. Lunchtime activities include allowing participants to eat their meals while having the discussion. Offering the activity once a week would be terrific, but once a month seems to be the more common schedule. Do not forget that nurses working evening or night shifts also have a need for this sort of activity. Time should be found for them to participate as well.
3. Keep track of who attends, who leads the discussion, and who suggests articles to read. Some hospitals require nurses to demonstrate their time devoted to professional development to climb the clinical ladder. Points may be given for participating in or leading a journal club discussion. Such incentives may increase participation. Be sure to offer all regular participants the opportunity to lead the discussion at some point.
4. Choose articles that have relevance to your setting. If the content of the article addresses a common unit problem or explains a commonly seen type of cancer, then the content will be easier to appreciate and apply. The questions we suggest can be used as prompts for discussion, adjusted according to the level of your

staff members, or completely replaced depending on your unit's needs. Regardless, journal club participants should assess the extent to which an article is evidence based and discuss how the information in the article will affect their practice. Other discussion questions will vary depending on the content and nature of the article.

5. Once or twice a year, challenge the staff to stretch beyond their comfort zone. Choose a research article or an article that addresses a topic seldom addressed on your unit. Perhaps you could invite a published author from your facility to attend and discuss his or her article. Challenge participants to identify a situation or technique from the unit that might be appropriate as a publication or presentation, and then follow through with the write-up. Activities that extend the reach or application of a journal club activity will likely stimulate participants and attract new members.

In the crazy-busy world of health care today, devising good ways to keep staff energized and focused is a huge challenge. A journal club can foster both collegiality and professional development, and, over time, the habit of reading professional literature can become more automatic and enjoyable, bringing benefits to individual staff members and the unit as a whole. There is virtually no limit to the amount of creativity that can be applied to increase the value of this activity for all involved. 

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