Making Our Voices Heard: Why Student Journals are Crucial

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The studentBMJ has provided a forum for medical student debate for the past eight years. The issues that students need to discuss deserve dedicated journal space. Being able to comment on issues such as admissions policies and teaching styles may affect many future generations of doctors as well. As there are thousands of doctors in training worldwide, the more ways available for students to express themselves, the better. A specific journal for Croatian medical students will allow a national perspective on these issues as well.

Key words: journalism; manuscripts; periodicals; students, medical; writing

To publish educational and entertaining material for medical students everywhere and facilitate international student debate on medical education, health and health policy.

studentBMJ mission statement

Every community needs a forum to debate its ideas. The studentBMJ has provided this for medical students in the UK for the past eight years. Our aim, however, has always been to represent medical students everywhere.

Studentbmj.com, our free web based journal, has certainly helped us achieve this. But, there are thousands of doctors in training worldwide and the more ways available for students to express themselves, the better. This is what makes the launch of a section dedicated to students in the Croatian Medical Journal so exciting.

At conception, the studentBMJ was really a monthly archive of the most student relevant parts of the BMJ. It is completely owned by the BMJ publishing group and is produced out of its offices in London, England. Two years after its launch, it was decided to take on a student editor each year. This editor took a year out of medical school to take control of commissioning, editing, and writing, and began to change the nature of the journal. It started to use more original material and was redesigned to appeal to its student readership. Since then, this appeal has continued to grow. The StudentBMJ consists of editorials, news, education, papers, and review sections. Most is specially commissioned, and written by doctors in tune with the educational and extracurricular needs and interests of students. The student editor post is now advertised every year and a successor selected after interview, by editors at the BMJ.

Students write the majority of our Life section. Any student can send in articles at any time. Many have not written before, and do not have to do anything more than send an article via e-mail. They cover the diverse range of thoughts, aspirations, and accomplishments that medical students experience all over the world. Medical students studying anywhere in the world are eligible to write for our journal. We also pay up to £100 for articles accepted. If you have an original idea, whether you have written for a journal before or not, we would be interested in hearing from you. You can contact us at the e-mail address at the end of this article. We also provide clear information on the sort of material we are looking for on our website at www.studentbmj.com/writing. Why, however, should we plug resources into a journal specifically for medical students?

Addressing the Problems

The issues that we need to discuss deserve dedicated journal space. Stress in medical students is a common phenomenon, for instance (1). The studentBMJ was able to highlight this issue, and point out ways that students can deal with stress more effectively. We recently addressed eating disorders in students and doctors (2). Simple advice and knowing about the resources available can be of great help to those who may be suffering in silence. Being able to comment on issues such as admissions policies, and teaching styles may affect many future generations of doctors as well (3). A specific journal for Croatian medical students will allow a national per-
spective on these issues. It will also encourage debate on specific issues in Croatia, such as the current shortage of jobs for young doctors.

**Catering for Our Needs**

The nature of medical journal development is traditionally slow. Student journals can generally adapt to reader’s demands much more rapidly. This means the content can closely reflect what you want to read. Design and layout is often more appealing and accessible as well. An example of this is the ‘Papers’ section of the studentBMJ. This has traditionally been perceived as irrelevant and uninteresting. While we have not abolished this section, we have been able to use shorter formats, add in commentaries, and use more interesting presentation to make it more appealing.

Students do much more than study at medical school. We are people too! We write, paint, campaign, travel, and vote as well. This is why our journals have to be flexible and varied in a way that is difficult for mainstream medical journals to do. We also appreciate educational material presented in innovative formats to aid our learning. We can provide case based learning with an emphasis on practical tips and aide memoirs.

**Success Depends on You**

Remember the *Student CMJ* is your journal. I hope readers will take ownership of this new venture, and help the project succeed. It is the readers and student contributors who make the journal great. With your help, it can go from strength to strength.

**References:**


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