

Evolution and determinants of sustainability of journal club in Nigerian postgraduate medical training institutions

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Received October 2, 2014. Accepted December 1, 2014

Abstract

Journal club is a veritable medium for knowledge creation especially at the postgraduate-level training in different fields of human endeavor. There are very few successful journal clubs unlike many postgraduate medical training institutions, and despite its being indispensable, the concept of journal club remains an area that has been ill-researched. The success of the evolved journal club till today is hampered by many factors. Some of these determinants are general apathy to attending sessions, lack of time, and inadequate preparations. Sustainable developmental theory was used to analyze the primary and secondary data collected. It was however clear that the success of the journal club was dependent on the beneficiaries, training institutions, and the respective bodies that oversee those training programs. It is therefore important that adequate research attention is given to this area to prevent it from going into extinction, which is the thrust of this article.

KEY WORDS: Journal club, determinants, postgraduate medical training, sustainable development

Introduction

Knowledge when created is carefully packaged into retrievable media or other resource materials. Some of these resource materials are journals that are periodic collection of research works, also called periodicals. They are used as channels of communication of research findings by the researcher to the benefiting community, for instance, the research published in journals by health workers and clinical management of individual patients often referred to as evidence-based medicine. Other examples are in the field of science and technology, agriculture and hybridization, political science and formulation of policies etc. The study of these journals, therefore, is imperative as it bridges core natural sciences and applied science and core arts and applied arts. It also solidifies the applied fields of arts and sciences. This systematic review of journals for application is what has midwived the concept of journal club.

It is noteworthy that there are dissimilar types of journals that may be subject, interest, or professionally driven,

for example, medical journals, law journals, and journals on development, mathematics, politics, and accounting. These journals are adequately discussed/reviewed during special sessions with a group of beneficiaries with similar interest, which is referred to as a journal club.^[1] The chosen journals are critically analyzed by the members for validity and also to transmit gained knowledge to improving related professional practice or fields of interest.^[2] This is expected to take place in a serene and conducive atmosphere.

With the help of recent technology via the Internet and intranet, virtual journal clubs have removed physical barriers such as distance, time zones, variation in the background of beneficiaries, and geographical differences by the offer of virtual journal clubs, which freely allows journal clubs to be held around the globe at the same time.^[3-5]

This article is therefore intended to stimulate the uptake of journal clubs by training institutions and rejuvenate the thirst for critical review of journals in postgraduate training institutions thereby increasing efficiency in medical professional practice.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Definitions

The study principally used existing literatures and records relevant to the subject matter. Pieces of information and data were sourced from journals, internet blogs, and verbal interviews with people who have been running journal clubs. Some of the information is from authors who have been consistently running the journal club in the

Access this article online

Website: <http://www.ijmsph.com>

DOI: 10.5455/ijmsph.2015.0210201452

Quick Response Code:



Department of Family Medicine of Benue State University Teaching Hospital, Makurdi, for many years. Using the sustainable development theory and descriptive and deductive approaches, conclusions were drawn having critically reviewed relevant issues in existing related data and literatures.

The concept “sustainable development,” as defined by the Brundtland Commission, is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.^[6] According to Linzer^[1], journal club is the coming together of group of individuals who meet regularly to critically evaluate recent articles published in academic literature in the field of either science or philosophy.

Literature Review

There is a paucity of literature on the history of journal club but many people were known to have been informally reading and reviewing periodically them in the field of medicine well before the 19th century.^[1,7] In the mid 19th century, Sir James Paget first described a group at St. Bartholomew Hospital in London with the sole aim of reading journals.^[1,8] The hospital then had a small library that was not conducive for reading. Since the library was not suitable for reading, Sir James began reading his journals in a small room over a baker's shop near the gate of the hospital at the close of work where others meet in the evenings to play cards. He initially started alone but later was joined by his students whom he selected.^[1,8] It is not clear whether his mode of selection was without bias, which might have affected the club's sustainability. The challenge Sir James Paget had then was lack of a conducive environment within the premises of the hospital where he worked. The issue of lack of space (conducive environment for journal club) has always been a recurring problem in many training institutions in Nigeria and has negatively affected the growth and effectiveness of journal clubs in these training institutions.

In 1987, Sir William Osler was known to have successfully organized a journal club at McGill University. The purpose for Osler's early journal club was to purchase and distribute journals/periodicals to beneficiaries to enhance their professional performance.^[1,8] Unfortunately, he faced a setback because he could hardly afford to subscribe to those periodicals. Again, many training institutions in Nigeria also face this setback as journal subscription is entirely in the hands of the beneficiaries who find it difficult to maintain. This is sometimes so because there is usually no budgetary allocations specifically for the management of journal clubs.

Several authors suggest that journal clubs were found in certain European countries like Germany and England before 1875. It is noteworthy that in the 1900s in Germany, journal clubs were routinely found in departments of medicine and medical schools.^[1] From 1917 to 1975, journal club evolved to be a part of continuing medical education, and most recently, it has been designed to teach critical appraisal skills. It is still a challenge that review of journals

has not been formally incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum of Nigerian universities.^[1] In Nigeria, there are now many postgraduate medical training institutions but few functional journal clubs. Their challenges today are not different from those faced by the pioneers of journal clubs and the early training institutions the world over.

Significance of Journal Club

Journal review seems to be the bedrock of any postgraduate training. The goals of journal club include motivation of beneficiaries to stay current with literature in their field of interest, promoting evidence-based practice and teaching critical appraisal.^[7,9] Others include improving the knowledge of statistics and developing life-long learning skills and presentation skills among members. Journal clubs when firmly established and sustained could be a source of credit for continuous subject or professional education.

Sustainability/Management of Journal Club

Many of the journal clubs in the past folded up because they faced various challenges. Some of these challenges that led to their extinction were financial, personnel (from beneficiaries), from the management team of those training institutions, or even a variable combination.

Sustainability of journal clubs is a collective responsibility. This responsibility is spread across the beneficiaries of the club on the one hand and the management team of that training institution on the other. Although journal review is an integral part of postgraduate training, there are generally variable degrees of apathy, lack of time, inadequate preparation, and poor attendance by the beneficiaries who are only mobilized by their respective heads.^[9-11] This is why Swift^[9] concluded that it was the reason why most journal clubs were functioning suboptimally. These heads of training institutions are responsible for smooth running of the clubs. The beneficiaries usually take turns in the review of journals under the supervision of their respective heads or coordinators at every session. This concept is well illustrated in postgraduate training of resident doctors where the consultant as coordinator encourages the resident doctors to attend and also anchor some of the sessions.

Journal club sessions are held at the discretion of the beneficiaries, but in most cases they are held on monthly basis and at fixed times (e.g., first Friday of every month) and venue. This is not only to allow for good publicity but also to give time for the presenter to extensively read round the topic for effective discussion, to have a sound scientific appraisal of the topic, and to sieve out its relevance in the domain of practice before the proposed date. Beneficiaries of the journal club are also encouraged to participate and initiate their own researches and, most importantly, to collaborate with other journal clubs and research groups.

The management team of the training institution however needs to provide conducive environment (a fixed

venue) for the journal club. This is important because highly fleeting journal club venues discourage attendance and could also lead to postponement of sessions and eventually bringing the activities of the club to a halt. Apart from providing a sustained conducive environment, management team needs to support the journal club by subscribing to various recent and relevant journals in the respective fields of the beneficiaries. Standard libraries, including electronic library, need to be provided with adequate and experienced staff. Management also needs to take responsibility of training and re-training these support staff that manage these libraries and to ensure collaboration with functional libraries all over the world.^[12] This could also serve as quality control. Most importantly for these clubs to be sustainable, management of postgraduate institutions should also ensure that the administrative head of the journal club should be the one that has practical experience in research and management with good interpersonal relationship qualities.

Impromptu visits to journal club sessions by some management staff of the training institution and periodic visits by accreditation bodies are ways of ensuring quality of a journal club.

When the above observations are adequately addressed, a journal club will be sustained beyond 2 years with a cumulative attendance of more than 50% by the beneficiaries as posited by Sidorov^[13] as an indicator of a successful journal club.

Way Forward/Recommendations

Since journal review is key to evidence-based practice, the growth of journal club should be given its deserved contemplation. To help realize this goal, the following recommendations are proffered:

- There should be a separate budget, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation for journal clubs in postgraduate training institutions.
- Management executives of postgraduate training institutions should provide fixed and conducive environment for holding journal club sessions.
- Postgraduate training institutions should have focal staff saddled with the sole responsibility of a managing journal club and to ensure accountability.
- Management executives of postgraduate institutions should encourage local research (especially that emanating from their respective journal clubs) by ensuring they have an ethics review committee and periodic local journal publications with a functional editorial board.
- Management of institutions should find ways of motivating beneficiaries, for example, by providing snacks during sessions and sessions should not be unnecessarily prolonged. Special research grants can be given to researches emanating from their respective journal clubs.
- Accreditation bodies should insist on training institutions on having functional journal clubs and electronic

libraries, and impromptu visits of such bodies should be encouraged.

Conclusion

The concept of journal club has gradually evolved over a long period of time amid varying challenges. Its place in modern practices is indispensable, and measures should be taken to sustain it especially in all postgraduate training institutions in Nigeria to avoid its extinction.

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How to cite this article: Igbudu TJ, Egwuda L, Omokhua OE, Mngutyo J. Evolution and determinants of sustainability of journal club in Nigerian postgraduate medical training institutions. *Int J Med Sci Public Health* 2015;4:148-150

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.