

INVITED EDITORIAL

Why should medical students engage with medical journal publishing

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Medical students are often very busy with their educational and personal commitments. The process of medical education with its academic challenges, clinical placements, and relentless pursuit of knowledge to prepare one's career as a healthcare professional can be all consuming. Amidst this whirlwind, the idea of contributing to a medical journal might seem like an unnecessary addition to an already over-committed program. However, engaging with medical journal publishing offers invaluable opportunities for personal and professional growth, and New Zealand medical students, in particular, stand to gain immensely from this involvement.

Medical journal publishing, at its core, is about the dissemination of knowledge. Contributing to this process may serve as a gateway to enhancing critical thinking, understanding evidence-based medicine, and connecting with the broader medical community. These attributes are not just desirable but essential for the modern doctor. Publications in medical journals also produce the currency of academic medicine (citation scores, H index, impact factor etc). Understanding how manuscripts are managed and what determines publication opens the door to this secret garden of knowledge.

The New Zealand healthcare system uniquely bridges perspectives of Western medicine and indigenous Māori health. The role of students in contributing to academic discourse is pivotal as they help progress the typical conservative views held in medicine. Our healthcare landscape is shaped by diverse cultural contexts and an evolving understanding of health equity, which students are well-placed to explore and highlight in academic literature.

1. Building critical thinking and academic skills

Engaging with medical journal publishing fosters a deeper understanding of research methodologies, data analysis, and critical appraisal of literature. By contributing to publications, students learn to navigate the intricate process of hypothesis formulation, study design, data interpretation, and peer review. These skills are transferable not just to research but also to clinical decision-making, where evidence-based practice is paramount. For instance, when a medical student writes or contributes to a systematic review or a case report, they refine their ability to discern quality evidence from noise. This skill is invaluable when they are later faced with clinical dilemmas requiring quick but informed decisions.

Moreover, writing for journals demands precision, clarity and the ability to convey complex ideas succinctly. These are skills that are indispensable in medicine. Whether it is documenting patient notes, writing referral letters, or explaining treatment plans to patients, effective communication is a cornerstone of good medical practice.

2. Cultivating a research-oriented mindset

Medical journals are at the forefront of advancements in healthcare. As future doctors, students need to be not only consumers of

knowledge but also contributors. Engaging with publishing nurtures a research-oriented mindset, encouraging students to question established norms and explore innovative solutions.

What gets published helps determine what perspective there is on a topic. In New Zealand, where rural healthcare, mental health services, and Māori health outcomes are pressing concerns, students can play an active role in generating research that addresses these challenges. By highlighting gaps in healthcare delivery or proposing culturally appropriate interventions, they contribute to a body of work that can influence policy and practice. Consider the example of a student researching the impact of whānau-centred healthcare models on patient outcomes. Publishing findings in a medical journal not only validates their efforts but also amplifies their impact, potentially inspiring other regions to adopt similar models.

3. Networking and professional development

Publishing in medical journals allows students to engage with mentors, peers, and professionals in their field of interest. These connections may lead to research collaborations, academic positions, and clinical opportunities. For medical students in New Zealand, connecting with researchers working on local issues such as rural health disparities or the integration of rongoā Māori (traditional Māori medicine) into primary care could provide unique career pathways. These experiences enhance a student's curriculum vitae, making them stand out in competitive training programmes or postgraduate applications.

Furthermore, the peer review process often involves receiving constructive feedback from experienced researchers. This mentorship, albeit indirect, helps students refine their thinking and improve their work, preparing them for the rigours of medical academia and clinical practice.

4. Contributing to health equity and representation

New Zealand faces distinct healthcare challenges, with disparities in health outcomes between Māori and non-Māori populations being a significant concern. Medical students can use journal publishing as a platform to highlight these inequities, propose solutions, and advocate for change. For example, a student researching barriers to healthcare access for Māori in rural areas could publish their findings to raise awareness and instigate discussions at both a community and policy level. Such contributions are not just academic exercises; they have the potential to drive tangible improvements in health services and outcomes.

Moreover, having medical students from diverse backgrounds contribute to journals ensures that a wide range of perspectives are represented. This is particularly important in a multicultural society like ours, where understanding and respecting cultural nuances can significantly impact healthcare delivery.

5. Inspiring a lifelong commitment to learning

Engaging with medical journal publishing fosters a habit of continuous learning and curiosity. These traits are indispensable for doctors, who must keep abreast of advancements in medicine throughout their careers.

For students, the process of writing and publishing a paper can be transformative. It often begins as a daunting task but evolves into a journey of discovery, resilience, and achievement. The satisfaction of seeing one's work published in a reputable journal can be a powerful motivator, instilling confidence and a sense of purpose.

Conclusion

In the fast-evolving world of medicine, the ability to engage with and contribute to academic discourse is an invaluable skill. For medical students in New Zealand, engaging with medical journal publishing offers not just personal and professional growth, but also the chance to address critical local and global health challenges.

By participating in this process, students can amplify their voices, contribute to the collective knowledge of the medical community, and inspire change in areas that matter most. It is a demanding but deeply rewarding endeavour - one that every medical student should consider embracing. After all, the future of medicine lies in the hands of those who dare to question, learn, and share.

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