Coping with change

The concept of a continuum of medical education from admission to medical school throughout a lifetime of professional learning is not a new one. Indeed it was one of the founding principles of the Postgraduate Medical Journal, when it was first published in 1925. The Journal was intended to be read throughout the English-speaking world. Its aims were to perfect and develop the skills and habits acquired as a medical student, to assist the generalist and the specialist alike, and to foster postgraduate teaching, 'in the face of very spasmodic encouragement'.

Seventy years later, those aims remain the same (see box). In contrast, the educational needs of doctors have changed, and indeed are constantly changing. Those changes are the results of changing circumstances, changing skill requirements, and changing medical knowledge.

Doctors, of course, vary in their abilities to keep up with these developments. For some, keeping up is easy to achieve. For others, particularly those with a heavy clinical workload, or those who are working in geographical isolation, the processes of continuing medical education and professional development may falter.

Doctors also vary in their approaches to keeping abreast of developments. Some prefer to attend courses or conferences. Several surveys have shown, however, that journal reading is the method which the majority of doctors prefer in terms of allowing them to keep up-to-date.

For the specialist, that reading will consist predominantly of their own specialty journals which are often linked to national bodies or societies. Such an approach may fulfill their educational requirements as far as their own specialty is concerned, but may not allow for continuing education in medicine in general. Because of the increasing time restraints that doctors now work under, from busy clinical loads or increasing managerial responsibilities, doctors do not have the time to do everything. They have to prioritise their time, and something has to be given up. Often that something is their continuing education in medical topics outside of their specialties.

In contrast to a specialty journal, the Postgraduate Medical Journal is a general medical journal and has a readership which extends throughout the English-speaking world. As such, therefore, it has a unique opportunity to help today's doctor through what is, after all, the longest and most critically important stage of his or her medical education.

Just as the educational needs of doctors are changing so must a medical journal adapt and develop so that it can achieve its aims. The Postgraduate Medical Journal is no exception to that rule. The regular reader will already have noticed the new format, the new publisher, and indeed the new Editor. As a 40-year-old consultant, that Editor is well aware of the difficulties of continuing his own medical education. To try and help overcome those difficulties, several other developments have taken place within the journal.

Self-assessment corner

Each issue will contain a self-assessment corner, designed so that the reader of the Postgraduate Medical Journal may actively participate by testing his or her knowledge, rather than rely on passive learning. The self-assessment will take many forms, including multiple-choice questions, and the interpretation of physical signs, diagnostic images and laboratory results. The answers to each exercise will include a brief update on the condition in question.

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**Postgraduate Medical Journal Aims**

- to help doctors in training to acquire the necessary skills to enable them to deliver the highest possible standards of patient care
- to help the trainers to develop suitable training programmes for their trainees
- once training is completed, to allow doctors to maintain high standards by a process of continuing medical education

**Postgraduate Medical Journal Forthcoming articles**

- practical – to allow readers to learn ‘around’ specific situations or problems, be they clinical, managerial or educational
- time-efficient – to allow readers to make the best use of the limited time they have for private reading
- reader-friendly – to allow readers to skim read as necessary

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**Figure** One of the early covers of the Postgraduate Medical Journal
Review articles

Each issue of the Postgraduate Medical Journal will contain several review articles, many of which will be part of a series (which may be published in book form at a later date). Each review will focus on a particular issue rather than attempt to cover the whole of a particular subject. These articles will give practical advice, in as time-efficient a manner as possible, and will each include an appropriate bibliography to allow the interested reader to delve deeper, as necessary.

Original articles

Original articles and short reports will continue to be published. From henceforth, they will, however, appear in a more reader-friendly format by the use of boxes containing learning and summary points, to emphasise the educational aspect of each article. Case reports have long been a prominent feature of the Postgraduate Medical Journal, and have indeed provided many doctors with their first medical publication. Such reports will continue to be welcomed.

International Postgraduate Diary

Though the preferred method of most doctors for keeping abreast of developments, the medical journal will never replace conferences or courses. Through its Postgraduate Diary, however, the Postgraduate Medical Journal will continue to keep its readers informed of forthcoming events which may be of interest.

Book reviews

Similarly, the book review section will allow readers to keep up-to-date with publications that might be of interest, whether for personal (or institutional) purchase or to borrow a copy from the local medical library.

Letters to the Editor

This section offers the opportunity for the Journal’s readers to comment on what they have read. Such comments are always welcome, and indeed suggestions for future articles are also encouraged. Dialogue with the readership is helpful to the Editor of any journal.

Supplements

The Postgraduate Medical Journal will continue its tradition of publishing supplements. In the past, these have contained details of medical meetings or Festschrifts for eminent colleagues. In future, the supplements will also include guidelines on patient care and practical help on attempting a variety of postgraduate medical examinations.

These changes in style and substance to the journal will hopefully reinforce the existing strengths of the Postgraduate Medical Journal. Those strengths have been developed over the past 15 years by its previous editor, Dr Barry Hoffbrand, to whom that Journal owes an enormous debt of gratitude for his splendid work, which has ensured that the Postgraduate Medical Journal is now well placed to meet the educational needs of the modern doctor.

CHARLES RK HIND
Editor

Coping with change.

C. R. Hind

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