The journal club

Sir,

Valentini and Daniels' article¹ was illuminating both for those who might be interested in organising new journal clubs and those wishing to resurrect defunct ones. However, one important function of the journal club was not covered in the article, which may be of interest to those just starting out in the publications game. Sackett suggested that a journal club can be a useful forum in which to develop and enhance critical appraisal skills.² The acquisition of critical appraisal skills should not be an end in itself, but a means to an end. Journal clubs can serve as the springboard for the production of correspondences to editors of journals following critical appraisal of articles. Critical appraisal skills may also lead to production of views that may influence policies. Correspondence to editors, for example, in the form of critical comments on specific articles, form important and integral parts of most journals. Those that get published are usually original, contain assertions supported by data or by citation, and are written in a clear prose style.³ That generation of correspondence to editors is an important but relatively untapped function of journal clubs is highlighted by the experience of Sandifer et al.⁴ In their evaluation of their journal club's activities in the first six months of its existence, the impact on commissioning policy and the publication of letters to the editor of the journal from which the articles were selected were used as outcome measures. Six out of 10 letters generated after collective appraisal were published. They identified the presence of a team of regular attenders and the relevance of the articles to everyday practice as critical factors which influence the success of a journal club. One of the cardinal rules for successful critical appraisal of articles is to avoid prejudging the articles on the basis of source, authors or preconceptions. This can be most successfully performed in the ambience of a journal club meeting because of the variation in the composition of its membership in terms of seniority and experience.

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Accepted 25 June 1997

Anticoagulants for venous thrombosis

Sir,

Dr Toh¹ hopes that a major benefit of outpatient treatment of deep venous thrombosis using low-molecular-weight heparin will be to reduce bed shortages. Our initial experience of home treatment for deep vein thrombosis may challenge that view.

Over the first three months of our service we anticoagulated 15 patients for deep venous thrombosis as out-patients using low-molecular-weight heparin to avoid bed shortages. Our initial experience of home treatment for deep vein thrombosis may challenge that view.

At the end of the first three months of our service we anticoagulated 15 patients for deep venous thrombosis as out-patients using low-molecular-weight heparin, with no significant incidence of complications.

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Accepted 25 June 1997


The journal club.

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Postgrad Med J 1997 73: 687
doi: 10.1136/pgmj.73.864.687

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