

## Academic Discourse and the Modern-Day Health Science Student

### *The value of publication and the development of the UBC Medical Journal*



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The importance of academic journals for dialogue in medicine and health science cannot be overestimated. Journals are the cornerstone for communication, acting as the fundamental vehicle for transmitting the vibrant social and scientific discourse that makes the field of medicine so enthralling. Academic journals are the forum in which world-altering treatises are recorded in history: from the purification of insulin in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*<sup>1</sup>, to the discovery of DNA in *Nature*<sup>2</sup>, to the development of site-directed mutagenesis by UBC's own Nobel prize winner, Dr. Michael Smith<sup>3</sup>. Journals are the foundation on which our repertoire of scientific and medical knowledge is built. They act as the collective voice of academia and provide the foundation for evidence-based clinical practice.

With the establishment of the *UBC Medical Journal*, we hope to contribute to this exciting field of medical dialogue. Believing strongly in the strength of students' ideas within the medical community, we seek to provide a forum for students to showcase their talents in scientific research and social thought, and to allow free and open discussion on the rapidly evolving trends that form the framework of healthcare today. In the past, student academic journals have

provided an important platform for communication and leadership—many leaders honed their skills in student academic journals—and we hope to provide this opportunity to strengthen the capacity of students for their journey into the professional world.

We realized that UBC medical students needed a journal that provided a place where the unique experience of being a student in North America's first distributed medical program and the diverse health care issues facing Western Canada could be represented and documented. The overwhelming response from students as editors, authors, and reviewers indicated that this indeed was a gap that needed filling. The tone of this first issue is distinctly British Columbian. Connors reports on methadone treatment in rural BC (pg.9), Rose *et al.* present a novel medical treatment for adhesive capsulitis (frozen shoulder) developed in BC (p.30), Rendall *et al.* captivate us with a successful inner city youth clinic developed by medical students (p.21), and Read tackles a health care issue at the forefront of political debates, psychiatric de-institutionalization (p.25).

Too often, students are at first unfamiliar with the process of publication: a great disadvantage when the style and format of manuscripts can be a barrier to acceptance. The *UBC Medical Journal* provides students the opportunity to become introduced to this world of academic publishing in a supported way. In addition, we pride the content of the *UBC Medical Journal* on being completely student-generated: everything from the management, content, design and the cover art. Editorial decisions are made by students. Our peer review process includes reviews from both faculty and students with expertise in the topic area, providing more educational opportunities. We are grateful for the mentorship and

expertise of faculty members who serve as article reviewers and advisors.

Student submissions are put through a rigorous peer review process to ensure that authors, reviewers, and editors alike gain experience within the important process of academic publication. In the *UBC Medical Journal*, each article is reviewed by one to two students and one faculty member, all with relevant credentials. This helps to ensure both accuracy of content as well as accessibility of the articles to a medical student audience. Our editorial staff are

highly experienced, many of whom are published scholars, who provide support to new and emerging writers and reviewers.

While developing this journal, we stumbled upon an original version of the *UBCMJ* that existed from 1962-1968 (these archives are now available on the *UBCMJ* website). Finding this

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## FROM THE EDITORS

record of medical students left a lasting impression on us, in terms of the vibrancy of the discourse within the pages and the quality of student work.

Our new journal, however, is adapted for the present day - throughout the development of the *UBCMJ*, we have worked with the philosophy that academic dialogue extends beyond the publication of the article itself. We have enhanced the level of engagement through the use of New Media. Using online tools, students can respond to information put before them, network with each other, and exchange novel ideas. The management of the journal is paralleled by interactive online wiki to democratise the process of knowledge generation. In this way, the interface of the *UBCMJ* is interactive, and we hope that this will allow for greater participation and transparency within publication.

We also stand behind the concept of open access, which we believe is truly the direction academic publishing will evolve in the next decade, and are continually looking for ways to incorporate this into our framework and functions. We are one of the only Canadian medical student journals that incorporates public domain software along the lines of the Public Library of Science (PloS). Through a partnership with the Public Knowledge Project<sup>4</sup>, we have a new online interface that allows for collaboration among students wherever they may be training to submit, read, review, and discuss articles. We are also committed

to being socially and environmentally responsible. Our internal administration is completely paperless and we have a requirement of all editors to sign the UBC Sustainability Pledge<sup>5</sup> as part of their job requirements to maintain a consciousness of their ecological footprint while participating in the publication process.

The *UBCMJ* came to fruition through the invaluable support of the UBC Faculty of Medicine, the *British Columbia Medical Journal*, the BCMA, and the CMA; the mentorship of patient and talented people within UBC and elsewhere; and the hard work of nearly 100 students and faculty across the province. To us, the support and welcome attitude with which this idea was received along each step of the way was instrumental to us being able to bring this project into being, and within such a short time period. We are truly grateful to everyone who has provided support.

Medical communication is an essential component of the development of our competency as physicians, and we hope that the *UBCMJ* will contribute to the education of medical students in this important sphere. We now open our pages to fellow health science students internationally and encourage submissions, comments and questions to [med.journal@ubc.ca](mailto:med.journal@ubc.ca).

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*BCMA sincerely congratulates  
the UBC medical student leaders  
who made the UBCMJ a reality.*

*BCMA supports **medical students**  
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– we invite you to visit the student site  
on [bcma.org](http://bcma.org) for more information.*