

# A journal club for professional networking and promotion of systematic review methodology

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### Abstract

*This article describes the launching of a journal club in the EAHIL Special Interest Group (SIG) for Evidence-Based Information. The key aim of the SIG is to bring together and connect all EAHIL members wanting to improve the quality of systematic reviews and other evidence-based products. One project was to set up a reference library with research papers on systematic review methodology and the role of librarians. To help translate research into practice and connect colleagues for discussion, a journal club was launched. Invited guests, such as the authors of a selected paper, not only information specialists, have been a successful feature and future development of the journal club may include inviting other authors such as students, PhD students or clinicians.*

**Key words:** education, professional; systematic reviews as topic; librarians; information storage and retrieval.

### Introduction

Journal clubs have existed for nearly 150 years, first starting in medicine (1, 2). They became a way of communicating evidence-based practice, and have subsequently also been adopted by academic libraries. Journal clubs seem to be more common within medical libraries compared to other libraries, and their purpose may differ depending on attendees, setting, or aims (1-4). Studies have shown journal clubs can result in a “research culture”, with an increased interest in research methods and application of these and facilitation of evidence-based practice within our professional field (5, 6). Unlike medical journal clubs, medical library journal clubs do not necessarily focus on critical appraisal. Instead, information professionals find journal clubs of value in discussing research within the profession, developing professional knowledge, building communities of practice and learning how to turn research into practice (7, 8).

In 2019, a new Special Interest Group (SIG) focusing on Evidence-Based Information was launched within European Association for Health Information and Li-

braries (EAHIL). The key aims were to strengthen and advocate for methodologies within evidence-based synthesis, and connect members to facilitate knowledge exchange (9). The group attracted many members from the start, and a list of specific projects (10) was set up in which members could participate to further contribute to fulfill the aims of the SIG. One of these projects aimed to set up a reference library with research papers on evidence synthesis methodology.

The project group developing the reference library has three members, and the reference library is an online Zotero library (11) one of the members had already started. To retrieve new papers in an efficient and structured way, alerts were created in a couple of key databases (such as PubMed and LISTA) and online journals (such as Systematic Reviews, Journal of Medical Library Association and Health Information & Libraries Journal). Relevant papers retrieved through these alerts and by other ways, are added manually to Zotero by members of the group. The topics covered by the papers in the library are not limited to search methodologies, but include also topics on the librari-

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ans' role in, for example, the systematic review process and the competencies needed in conducting systematic reviews, such as project management or the development of support and services as described in previous studies (12, 13).

### Method

#### Setting up a journal club

To facilitate translation of research into practice, and to bring colleagues together who work with systematic reviews for discussion, reflection and exchange of experiences, a journal club was launched. Relevant research papers for the journal club are chosen by the project group. Criteria for inclusion of a paper in the journal club is that the paper is focused on systematic review methods, or services and management of systematic reviews. Topics and questions for discussion are chosen to create an open atmosphere, where members would feel welcome regardless of their level of experience. We decided that the focus of the journal club should be on how the members integrate the topic of the paper into their daily practices, how they would do so if they currently are not doing so, what difficulties they encounter and above all to share experiences and learn from each other.

It was decided that two journal clubs would be held each year, one in spring and one in fall. To make participation possible for all due to the SIG members' different geographical locations, the journal club is held online via Zoom, with breakout rooms for small group discussions. We decided no registration in advance should be needed, to make participation easy. The organisers prepare a set of questions to accompany each paper, to encourage discussion and keep it focused. These questions are sent in advance along with the invitation for the journal club via the SIG email group. Minutes are taken, where the groups are helping to summarise the discussions, and these are added with notes from the final discussion in a brief report for those who could not attend. Reports from the journal clubs are available through the SIGs online platform in Google Docs (14).

### Result

#### Experiences so far

The journal club has so far been held twice with approximately 20 participants each time. The paper by McKeown *et al.* (12) in the first journal club in October

2022 was about development of a systematic review service. This topic was chosen as a starter since we thought the topic would be relevant to all members and would be great to use for reflection of our own different daily practices. The journal club participants were keen to talk and get to know each other in the small group discussions and the paper served well as a start for the journal club and its aims.

One of the SIG members suggested for the next journal club that we invited the authors of the paper to participate.

The second journal club, in March 2023, focused on grey literature and therefore the paper by Landerdahl-Stridsberg *et al.* (15) was chosen. We invited both the lead author, who is an information specialist, and a co-author, who is a researcher. They gave their perspectives on the value of grey literature, how to search for it and the challenges they encountered. This was highly appreciated and has the potential to make the journal club even more interesting and informative. The role of the information specialist was pointed out by the researcher as essential. The participants shared experiences and knowledge, led by the questions for discussion which were provided beforehand. They did so first in small breakout groups and afterwards shared their experiences with the whole group.

### Discussion

#### Future directions and benefits for both librarians and users

The participants of the journal clubs have helped create an open atmosphere, where exchange of knowledge and experiences have been welcomed. Using a research paper has been an excellent way to encourage deep reflection on participant's daily practices in relation to research results. The journal club format has provided opportunities to get to know each other's professional contexts, as well as highlighting relevant research within our field of expertise.

Participants have also been encouraged to make suggestions for improvement to the journal club format. Some of these, e.g. inviting the authors of a paper to present their research and contribute to the discussion, have been a very successful addition to the journal club. We will keep on encouraging participants to make suggestions. In the future we may invite other guests, e.g. students, PhD students, researchers or clinicians, who are also authors of research papers. In the course of

our work, we meet many of these user groups, and it would be very interesting to hear their perspectives on evidence synthesis methodologies, barriers and facilitators to implementation, and the role of the information professional within that.

Adding user perspective and librarian-researcher collaboration perspective by inviting guests to our journal clubs is something to work further with. We plan to continue with the journal club as a professional network and discussion group, and possibly also to extend it to include our users' valuable input. This could be made possible by altering the setup for the journal club, e.g. sometimes focusing on the paper and discussion with likeminded professionals, and sometimes, when possible, invite authors as guests to broaden our perspectives.

## Conclusion

The SIG journal club has encouraged reflection of daily practice in research results, and helped colleagues to connect with likeminded information professionals. Future directions for the journal club may be to include authors with different professional roles to widen our perspectives of systematic review methods and services and librarian-researcher collaboration.

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