

The *Dalhousie Medical Journal*: Past and present

The beginnings of the *Dalhousie Medical Journal* date from 1936. In that year, Dalhousie University had 850 students and there were about 50 students in each medical class. During a winter meeting of the Medical Students' Society in the medical school lecture theatre (now theatre D), a third year medical student named I. Roy Gold from Glace Bay, Cape Breton suggested that the students produce a medical journal. He felt that it was important to produce an official publication of the Student Medical Society to promote an interest in extra-curricular medical learning, to publish articles of regional interest and value both to medical students and alumni, and to serve as a communication link between Dalhousie medical students and the medical faculty. There was considerable discussion and some reservations were expressed. Many students were skeptical that such a huge undertaking could carry on from year to year. However, the vote was to establish a *Journal* using Dalhousie Medical Students' Society (DMSS) money and advertisement revenue as funding. It was the beginning of a journal that became the voice of the undergraduate medical students and the physicians of Nova Scotia.

In an editorial comment of the 6th volume in 1941, the objectives of the *Journal* were listed to be: a) to serve as the official publication of the Student Medical Society; b) to promote undergraduate interest in extra-curricular medical investigation; c) to afford students some training in the preparation and publication of scientific articles; d) to publish articles of interest and value to medical students and alumni; e) to serve as a link between medical alumni, their University, and fellow graduates.

In the early editions, the editors lived up to their objectives. The *Journal* was a printed forum for medical and non-medical discussions ranging from academic abstracts to zealous zoology. It included history papers, research articles, reviews, news, trends, social announcements, tributes, treatments, editorials, and comments on medical education. The articles in the 1937 volume included a tribute to Dr. John Stewart, the first dean of the Medical School, the use of Mandelic Acid in the treatment of UTIs, and an article about the pitfalls of not taking notes in class.

Many well known people were involved in the *Journal* while in medical school. Dr. Chester B Stewart, the Editor-In-Chief of the *Journal* in 1937, served as the Dean of Dalhousie medical school from 1954 to 1971, then became VP of health sciences of Dalhousie University, and received the Order of Canada in 1972 for his contributions to research. Also involved at that time was Dr. N. H. Gross, who later became the Lieutenant Governor for Nova Scotia. The members of the editorial board included several Americans who sought

medical training at Dalhousie due to religious discrimination at home. Dalhousie opened its arms to these men partially as a neighbourly gesture, but mostly because these foreigners paid much needed money to the school, helping Dalhousie Medical School to remain in operation.

Issues of the early editions were assembled with the help of the staff of the Dean's Office. Copies were sent to the faculty and the student body. Subscription rates for medical practitioners was \$1.00 per year.

However, after six years of publishing three issues per year, war broke out in Europe. This had a devastating impact on the curriculum, as is discussed in the editorial of the 1954 issue "[The *Dalhousie Medical Journal*] was suspended during the war years, as were many other medical publications, due to the abbreviated medical course which was given in Medical Schools and which did not leave time for such undertakings." In the years soon after the war, attempts were made to obtain sponsorship of the *Journal* from the DMSS; however, these requests were made in vain. It was not until 1954 that two persuasive editors named HJ Presutti and IH Koven convinced the DMSS to revive the *Journal*.

The aim of the new *Journal* was to open an "...era of increased awareness among the medical students of the importance of knowing how to express themselves in writing." The objectives of the *Journal* were laid out in its constitution: "...to encourage students to engage in scientific writing, to encourage the habit of reading medical material other than the specified textbooks, [and] to increase the interest of the practicing physicians in research at Dalhousie University..." These were modified in 1955 by the editor-in-chief and current pathology professor D Janigan. He suggested that the editors "keep an eye out for the original, historical, philosophical, humorous, or what have you, when selecting material." He went further to reinforce a comment made in a letter to the editor by Dr. HB Atlee, which he quoted as "it seems to me that if this journal is to be called a *Dalhousie Medical Journal*, it should wherever legitimately possible, live up to that name, and give the Dalhousie slant to its articles."

In the 16 years that followed, these goals were met by the regular publication of the *Journal*. Topics included articles on the history of Dalhousie Medical School, tributes to faculty who made this school what it is today and many learned reviews of what seemed at the time to be on the minds of the students and physicians in Nova Scotia. In 1960, Dean Stewart addressed the students encouraging them to write in the journal. He wrote, "When I first wrote for the *Journal*. I had no idea I would ever hold an academic position. Looking back now, I realize that the experience of writing for publication for the first time was a very valuable one indeed. One of the skills required by a doctor is the ability to express himself with reasonable clarity. [Each medical student] will at some time in your career have gained experience or special knowledge which you

should pass on to your confreres..." An article from 1965 discussed the physician's role in medicare legislation. In 1966, an article on the use of computers in medicine predicted with great accuracy the use of these machines, stating "...it is not farfetched to plan on having an electric console in the medical school or hospital that will print on high speed tape the requested summary of a medical article stored in the memory of a computer in a distant central library". By that year, circulation had reached 2500 and the distribution to the alumni became international.

Printing of the *Journal* was stopped in 1969. The student society, headed by President R Stewart, was asked to find funding for the *Journal* as advertising revenue was insufficient to continue publication of the journal. The decision to cease publication was, we are told, purely financial. The *Journal* has remained dormant in the library of Dalhousie Medical School for 26 years.

In 1995 the students, residents, and faculty of Dalhousie medical school have joined together to revive the *Dalhousie Medical Journal* for a second time. This issue is Volume 23, No.1. The aims of the *Journal* are much the same as the *Journal* of the past: To provide an outlet for the dissemination of papers on the basic and clinical aspects of medicine, surgery, medical education, medicolegal affairs, health care delivery, the history of medicine, public health, and articles concerned with the humane aspects of medicine; to provide a forum for medically related papers, particularly those of special significance to Atlantic Canada; to promote an interest in medical research amongst students, especially those in Atlantic Canada; and to provide individuals interested in the health sciences with the opportunity to become involved with the process of producing a scientific journal.

The challenge for the future is evident. As was so eloquently stated in the 1941 editorial comment "Other men [and women] of equal brilliance and merit have followed in the footsteps of the founders [of the *Journal*] and these have upheld the principles and standards which are the basis of the success of the publication; let us hope that this success will continue in the present and future years. It must be realized, however, that the future of the *Journal* lies not alone in the hands of a few students selected from various classes; it is the responsibility of every undergraduate in the Medical School..." The editorial board of the current journal includes health science students, residents, and undergraduate medical students. The current editorial board hopes that the *Journal* will enjoy future support from the medical community as it did in the past.

This *Journal* is dedicated to those who worked to prepare the *Journal* in the past. Particularly, we wish to acknowledge the contributions of IR Gold and CB Stewart in founding the original *Dalhousie Medical Journal*.

F Hassard, R Seth, and C Naugler, Nov. 1995

Comments and letters, addressed to the editor at the publication office, are welcome.

Dear Editor,

The renewal of publication of the *Dalhousie Medical Journal* is an accomplishment of which all of those students involved can be extremely proud. Working together as a team, students from all years have realized an achievement which will prove of great benefit to the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine and the health care community of Maritime Canada. This student run publication will provide an opportunity for those in the early stages of their careers to demonstrate their work to others. The *Journal* will also be allow faculty involved with student research and writing of review papers to recognize and promote achievement through working with students to publish their efforts. Not least importantly, the *Journal* will serve as a forum for the expression of opinion, enhancing debate and discussion in our Faculty. I have no doubt that many of those who go on to distinguished careers as physicians and researchers will later recall that their beginnings in publication were with the *Dalhousie Medical Journal*.

I am very impressed with the dedication which has been demonstrated in making the *Journal* a reality. The *Journal* is well organized, capable of credible peer review, and has been established and structured so as to give roles to students at all stages of training, allowing for its handing over to successive generations. This final point is an extremely important one, since sustainability of the *Journal* is, of course, the next challenge.

Congratulations on an important achievement.

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