

## Introducing: slices

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Medical journals are meant to both reflect the science behind medical practice and facilitate the advancement of the discipline.<sup>1</sup> They present newly generated knowledge in the field, with the general aim of improving health care. The effectiveness of a

journal article to convey its messages can potentially affect the development of health care.

Medical information from journals used to be designed for medical practitioners alone. Now, increasingly, publishers feel the need to package the same information to make it accessible to different types of readers. Almost always, readers go to journals to look for evidence that can support decisions about health. The common questions readers ask when looking for evidence in medical literature have something to do with incidence or prevalence of conditions, effectiveness of therapy or prevention, accuracy of diagnostic ap-

proaches, and associations of exposures and outcomes.<sup>2-4</sup>

Whereas the medical journal has long been recognized as an indispensable means of communicating scientific knowledge, it may not always be efficient in fulfilling this task.<sup>5</sup> Emerging changes in the communication landscape now call for quick, portable, on-demand information that provides instant gratification to the information receiver.<sup>6,7</sup> Efficient communication requires the information—such as the messages in medical journals—to be engaging, ample, and accurate. Information can be immediately useful when packaged this way. We have the appropriate technologies that facilitate this mode of communication exchange—the Internet, our computers and mobile phones, search engines, and social media, to name a few.

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**Figure 1** A “slice” from an article in Southern Philippines Medical Center Journal of Health Care Services (SPMC JHCS).



Medical journals compete with other media for the readers' attention. Full text journals are lengthy and often pervaded by esoteric concepts. They are useful to specialist and sub-specialist practitioners of health care, but are usually avoided by general readers. Useful evidence can just as well be obtained by reading the same information rendered in simpler formats.

Article abstracts offer abbreviated and simplified contents meant to engage the busy practitioners or those who want to skim through a few dozen literature to find what they are looking for. The thing with abstracts is that they may still take long to read, especially if one is looking for effectiveness of particular interventions, accuracy of specific diagnostics, associations of specific variables, or simply incidence or prevalence of conditions within patient subgroups.

Many journals now include article summaries that are even shorter than abstracts as insets embedded in the printed or online format of full text articles. Most often, the insets contain "what is already known" about the

article topic and "what the present study adds" to existing knowledge. In one inset, there are usually three to five statements that describe the new knowledge generated by the study reported in the article.

We designed a postcard-like format for communicating information (Figure 1). Each piece of information is taken from a previously published journal article, making it a "slice" from that article. The structure of the information statement itself (roughly) follows the widely accepted PICO (P - patient population or problem; I - intervention or exposure, C - comparison intervention or exposure, if relevant, O - outcome) framework of formulating an answerable evidence question.<sup>8</sup> The study design of the source research, and the "result" or "answer" to the question, are incorporated into the PICO framework to complete the statement of information. Depending on the content of the information, the statement structure may slightly vary. The unit of information is expressed in simple English language. A simple

illustrative chart and additional statistical information (e.g., point estimates and 95% confidence limits of odds ratios or risk ratios, p-values, etc.) may be appended to the information statement. The full citation and the link to the original article are also included in the format. The online version of the format can be shared through various social media and social networking services (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, email, etc.). The effect, we hope, would be a compact, shareable, evidence-based statement, a readable piece of science that does an efficient job of conveying important information.

Beginning this issue, we will feature journal article slices (as we now call them) in our print publication. We will also start posting them in our Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest accounts. In our website, we will maintain a searchable database of slices from the articles we publish. This is our contribution to making the communication of newly generated knowledge more efficient and effective.

#### Article source

Submitted

#### Peer review

Internal

#### Competing interests

None declared

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