
What you didn't know that you needed to know

MERETE KILE HOLTERMANN

Merete Kile Holtermann (born 1982) is managing editor of the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association and a medical doctor.

The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association has a new print design. But do we really need print journals any longer?



Photo: Einar Nilsen

Never before have so many scientific articles been published — around 2.5 million annually [\(1\)](#). In 2015, the Web of Science search database exceeded one billion indexed articles [\(2\)](#). Nor have so many academic journals ever existed before [\(1\)](#). The great majority of them are available online, and around 2.5 billion articles are downloaded from these each year [\(1\)](#).

Amidst this abundance of knowledge, available only a few clicks away, it is easy to believe that the print journal has had its day. Nonetheless, the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association's print edition is now being launched in a brand-new design, just as our web pages were renewed not long ago [\(3\)](#). Not only is it new in its appearance — the paper used is different and the composition of articles has changed. Why have we done this, and do print journals still have a place in today's media reality?

We believe that the answer is yes. Print journals still play an important role, but they must change in pace with the increase in the number of articles and publication channels, in order to meet new needs. A paper edition has different strengths from what is available digitally.

With so much information available, the challenge is to search, classify and find what you need. It is difficult to assess the quality of published material and easy to become overwhelmed. What if it is not the quantity of information that is the problem, but the strategies we use to classify and select? The American author Clay Sherky [\(4\)](#) describes it well. Among other things, he says: "It is not information overload, it is filter failure" [\(5\)](#). In the same way that a spam filter protects against your inbox being flooded with emails, we need to sort the information we need from all that we do *not* need. This applies equally to medical knowledge.

Academic journals have always filtered knowledge, and the eye of the needle is narrow in the most highly ranked journals. The articles undergo editorial assessment and external peer review, and only those that fulfil the criteria for quality and relevance are allowed through. Most disciplines have specialist journals that present a manageable volume of quality-assured information on narrow topics. When you trust the sender, following a few journals of this type provides you with much valuable and useful information, but in pace with the increasing volume of both articles and journals, the need for improved filters for you as a reader also increases.

A general medical journal, such as the one you are now reading, has a wider target group. Although the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association is essentially produced by and for Norwegian doctors, it should also reach readers with different fields of interest and specialties, and — if an article is translated — an even wider audience. It is therefore not enough to make the eye of the needle even narrower. In addition to filtering and quality-assurance, general medical journals should introduce you to topics that are on the fringes of your own discipline — knowledge that perhaps you will not search for yourself, but which catches your eye when you leaf through a paper edition. It is relevant to be aware of developments in tangential disciplines even though you work with something different on a daily basis. No doctor works in a professional vacuum: an orthopaedic surgeon should know the main trends in modern blood pressure measurement, an epidemiologist may benefit from knowing where the

clinical shoe pinches, and a general practitioner should have a general grasp of new surgical techniques. This is one of the reasons why we have a long and shared basic training in medicine. And it is one of the reasons why the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association should be more than a filter – it should be a curator. As a curator we shall classify and present, by compiling content that is relevant for your discipline as well as introducing you to new insight that you did not know you needed.

This is such an important aspect of our assignment that it is enshrined in the bye-laws of the Norwegian Medical Association as the first of the Journal's five purposes, namely 'to be an organ for medical education stimulating continued learning for clinicians' (6).

The role of the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association as curator is reflected in the print edition. One of the actions we are taking with our new design is to classify and present the content in four sections – Debate, Research, Features and News from The Norwegian Medical Association.

The print edition also gives us the opportunity to compile articles that elucidate the same topic. In this issue, for example, you will find an original article on contacts with out-of-hours services because of poisonings (7) together with an editorial commenting on the results of the original article and placing them in a broader context (8). And on the cover page the illustrator Isabel Albertos interprets the topic from a different point of view (9). By compiling the content and collecting it in this manner, the print issue of the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association serves as a curator that can help the reader to see connections and reflect on a particular topic.

It is our belief that the print edition is still important and useful for you as a reader, clinician, researcher and — above all — as a doctor. We hope that the renewal of the print edition will assist you in all these roles.

Let us know what you think — we want both praise and criticism. And we hope too that you will leaf through it and discover something that you didn't know you were wondering about.

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