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The Social Work Journal Club on Twitter

Blog Editor

By @Ermintrude2

The Social Work Journal Chat has become a space for practising social workers and social work students, service users, carers and anyone with an interest in social care, to discuss articles and policy documents relevant to social work. A journal article is chosen every fortnight and hosted on the blog and a time is agreed for participants to discuss and appraise the research and its applications to practice on twitter. The site was set up by @Ermintrude2, and here she discusses the importance of the space in improving access to research for those who have the most potential to see its recommendations realised.

Having used blogging as a medium to improve my own knowledge and awareness of policy papers and research around social care since 2007, I have long been a great proponent of the use of social media to link practitioners with research and researchers.

The idea was blatantly stolen from the Twitter Journal Club (<http://www.twitjc.com/about/>), which has been run for a few years, but specifically focuses on medical education papers for doctors and student doctors. I've often thought it would be a good idea to have a similar type space in social work, but I took a while to be convinced that a 'twitter chat' could embrace the range of conversations that might take place around a paper.

I was waiting for someone to start a similar journal club which related to my area of interest (social care and mental health specifically) but after waiting for a couple years, as I'm not generally someone who seizes these kind of things or has any desire to lead on them, I realised it wasn't going to happen unless I started it myself.

Thus the Social Work Journal Club Chat (<http://swjchat.wordpress.com/about/>) was born. As a practitioner rather than an academic, I had been frustrated sometimes by my lack of access to a lot of journals which were swinging around in the sector – mostly because I only have access to the Athens account, which I bought with my College of Social Work membership. While it is much better than not having any access, some journals, such as the British Journal of Social Work, are missing due to the ongoing politics between the British Association of Social Workers and the College of Social Work, which just only serves to prove that organisations are far more interested in their own ends than in social work practitioners having access to useful research.

The lack of assumed access to journals is the main reason I have, at least initially, restricted journal articles which we have discussed so far to open access. It's my intention to keep it that way, but realistically I'm not sure how long it will be possible to maintain. I do believe that there is a lack of understanding in the academic communities about how difficult it can be for practitioners to access information which is often assumed.

The blog itself is primarily based around the chats, however my plan is to branch out and use it to summarise and critique research papers that I read, even if they aren't specifically discussed in a chat time (although this may happen in the comments section at any time). I think it's important that we have access to useful information which we can use in practice. Some of the most gratifying feedback I've had is from practitioners who have told me they have used the papers I've linked to at work.

As a social worker, I have a professional responsibility to ensure that my knowledge is up to date and that I am both aware and actively involved in seeking out relevant research. The gap between the world of 'research' and the world of social work practice is too wide. There is a lack of understanding on both sides. In order to serve the people who use services best, these two worlds need to move together so ensure the information needed is readily available.

The Social Work Journal Club as a Twitter chat and as a blog is still very young. I don't want to 'own' it, but hope others will become involved in writing about papers and leading chats (all are welcome to!). I hope, in time, it can truly become a

collaborative community resource – my dream is that someone else takes over actually and I can be a participant rather than a ‘leader’. It might work, it might fail miserably, but it’s worth a try.

We, as practitioners, have more opportunity now to take responsibility for our own learning and use more information and links that we can make to ensure that our practice feeds from current and active research by drawing in those involved with research. We can also, I hope, feedback what we find useful and what improves our practice. More conversations and broader communities can only serve to make social work practice, and research, richer.

For updates and more information on the Social Work Journal Club follow @swjchat on twitter.

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