

# Small Is Difficult: Issues for Small Journals and Subspecialty Journals

**Moderator:**

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*Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde [Dutch Journal of Medicine]*

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**Speakers:**

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*Canadian Medical Association*  
Ottawa, Ontario

**Torben Schroeder**

*Ugeskrift for Læger [Journal of Danish Medical Association]*

Copenhagen, Denmark

**Ana Marusic**

*Croatian Medical Journal*  
Zagreb, Croatia

**Reporter:**

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Small and subspecialty journals have a difficult task in competing with prominent and influential journals for authors, readers, and revenue. However, they often fulfill roles in their communities that large and international journals cannot. This is particularly true for journals for national bodies of professionals, such as physicians. Torben Schroeder, who edits the major national medical journal in Denmark, explained how the *Ugeskrift for Læger* pays special attention to the quality of language, seeing the development of national terminology as one of the important roles of a national journal. Education and translation of newest research for the national readers are other goals—they are

accomplished by translating articles from international journals, especially those written by Danish authors.

On the other end of the spectrum, national journals in English-speaking countries face similar but also unique issues. They may not be “small” in the same sense as national journals in most non-English-speaking countries. As Glenda Proctor described, the Canadian Medical Association prints 60,000 copies per issue of its flagship journal, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, and 700 to 10,000 copies per issue of each of seven specialty journals. In an English-language-dominated publishing arena, they have to compete for readers and authors. Readers expect content that is relevant, useful, interesting, and of high quality. Physicians working in small communities outside research and education centers have needs and expectations different from those fully involved in clinical research. For the former, editorials, commentaries, debate, and guidelines may provide more information and applicability. Proctor emphasized the need to appreciate the differences between readers of the print journal and the online journal; “virtual” readers want good searching and linking, and they want supporting and supplemental content. The best way to feel your readership is to survey it, preferably annually, to learn who reads the journal and why.

Attracting authors is as important as attracting readers. Small journals (and probably even large ones) should not wait for authors to submit their work but should actively solicit good articles. The strategy of the Canadian Medical Association journals is to ask international experts to write reviews and commentaries on research articles or to invite Canadians who have

published research in other international journals to write about their work. Soliciting peer reviews from international experts, attracting respected professionals to editorial boards, and offering help to inexperienced authors are effective strategies.

Assisting authors or, rather, collaborating with authors on the best presentation of their work is a common feature of small journals. Ana Marusic, editor of an English-language general medical journal in a developing country, described the role of her journal as primarily education in a scientific community burdened by financial and communication problems, which lead to poor visibility of research output in mainstream science. She described the role of the *Croatian Medical Journal* as a step for its authors toward joining the global scientific community: “If we teach authors how to publish in our journal, then they should not be afraid to go on publishing in other international journals!” All presenters emphasized that author-helpful policies are not possible without the dedication of all professionals involved in the publication process—editors, members of the editorial board, peer reviewers, and editorial staff—and, unfortunately, money!

Small journals have to explore all sources of revenue: from submission fees, page charges, and reprint sales to Web access or pay per view and Web advertising, document delivery services, and aggregator royalties. They have to constantly examine current business trends and models and market themselves accordingly. However, reaching out to readers and authors is the key to success, and visibility on the Internet is the best tool for reaching out! 