

Introducing Synopsis: a view onto medicine

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The skill of writing is to create a context in which
other people can think.
— Edwin Schlossberg

In this issue of *CMAJ* we introduce a new section called Synopsis. A noticeable departure from our usual format, it embodies a change in philosophy regarding the scope of what we will provide our readers. As physicians weather an endless onslaught of information, we are keenly aware at the Journal that we are competing for our readers' time. In the ever-changing climate of medical publishing, we are convinced that clarity and conciseness must form the basis for our editorial strategy.

At a time when physicians specialize and subspecialize, and so many publications vie for a say, general medical journals are under particular pressure to provide information that a wide range of readers will find relevant. As medicine becomes increasingly complex, there is a pressing need to transcend jargon and present information in a way that makes it accessible to the academic surgeon in Winnipeg and the family physician in Wawa.¹ Busy physicians in all practice settings need information sources that are both concise and accurate. There is no secret as to how this can be accomplished: it is a matter of language.

The word Synopsis connotes both "summary" and "overview." Our aim is to take disparate and often complex material and translate it into plain language. This is not a new concept; similar formats have been used successfully in distinguished publications such as *Science* and *Nature*, which face the same challenge (and perhaps a greater one) of presenting diverse and often esoteric material.

Specifically, Synopsis will contain the sections News, Analysis and Practice. In News we will report, as before, on important issues in Canadian health care but will continue to expand our view to encompass a broader, more global context. The Analysis section will contain longer examinations of various health-related topics. For example, in this issue we include a medicolegal piece that explains the ruling in a patient sexual abuse case, and an article examining

the ethics of research performed outside academic institutions. Under the heading Science and Medicine, we will also provide the reader with summaries of interesting topics in basic science that may have an impact on medicine in the future. The popular Practice section has also been folded into Synopsis. The Clinical Vistas and Health and Drug Alerts columns will continue to be nimbly edited and written by Eric Wooltorton. We welcome Steven Shumak as the new editor of the In the Literature column; he takes over from Donald Farquhar, to whom we are indebted for its inception. Although Synopsis is made of many parts, we hope that, in its entirety, it will provide a broad look at important issues in health care.

The most obvious aspect of Synopsis, of course, is that it *looks* different. Should medical journals concern themselves with aesthetics? We believe that they should, and in planning the design changes in Synopsis we considered the symbiotic relationship of function and form. Our aim is to maximize both the reader's interest and the extraction of information. The process launched with Synopsis will culminate in a major redesign of *CMAJ* by year's end. Although W. Somerset Maugham pointed out that "It's asking a great deal that things should appeal to your reason as well as your sense of the aesthetic," we hope that changes in *CMAJ* now and in the year to come will indeed satisfy both.

Dr. Choi is a Deputy Editor with *CMAJ*.

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Reference

1. Maskalyk J. The editing life [editorial]. *CMAJ* 2002;167(11):1252.

Editor's note: CMAJ is currently accepting submissions for Synopsis. Please refer to our guidelines for authors in this issue or at www.cmaj.ca

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