Critical appraisal of current literature is important when embarking on a new clinical study (Laidlaw 2012). Several workshops teach critical appraisal as step 3 of evidence-based medicine. However, few workshops address critical appraisal in anticipation of implementing a clinical study, much less, how to deliver the results of the critique to the original author is not described.

We presented a two-day workshop on how to write a letter to the editor as part of a two-year distance-learning program to acquire the skills necessary to conduct clinical studies. Participants were recruited online, and the inclusion criteria comprised medical doctors with at least four years of clinical experience who had never learned how to do clinical research.

During the first year, they watched a three-hour movie about clinical research and then submitted homework every month. Thereafter, group feedback was given for one hour each month between May and November via online conferences, and they participated in a two-day workshop review in July.

Another 8-hour, two-part workshop proceeded during December. Before the first day, students in groups of 3 or 4 selected a full original article to critique. The first half comprised a lecture about confounding, bias, and how to write a letter to the editor. Each group was provided with a facilitator who had at least one year of clinical research experience. The second half comprised presentations about their critical appraisals and suggestions for the article. Three workshops proceeded in 2015, 2016, and 2017. A total of 38 participants in nine groups wrote 13 letters about articles, of which 11 were accepted.

Generally, the workshop was well received and the students were satisfied. However, two groups could not achieve acceptance. One group missed the deadline in 2015. We held a flipped lecture about how to write a letter to the editor before the workshop and gave two hours to write one. One group missed the reply from the journal and missed the deadline in 2016. We will limit the journal choices and inform the students of the actual reply.

To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to teach the skills required to write a letter to the editor. We plan to improve the workshop to support clinicians who embark on clinical research projects.

Keywords: letter to the editor; continuing medical education
Notes On Contributors

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Bibliography/References


Declarations

The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Ethics Statement

This program was not reviewed by an institutional review board, but we followed the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and obtained written informed consent from each of the respondents to participate and we anonymized the presentation.

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