

# Medical Journals

**M**edical journals are publications that report medical information to physicians and other health professionals. With the development of electronic publishing, many medical journals now have Web sites on the Internet, and some journals publish only online. A few medical journals, like *JAMA*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, are considered **general medical journals** because they cover many fields of medicine. Most medical journals are specialty journals that focus on a particular area of medicine. The April 19, 2006, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about use of medical journal articles by doctors. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the June 5, 2002, issue of *JAMA*.

## TYPES OF ARTICLES

- **Research articles** report the results of research studies on a range of topics varying from the basic mechanisms of diseases to clinical trials that compare outcomes of different treatments. Research articles on important topics may be covered by the news media after they are published in a medical journal.
- **Review articles** summarize and analyze the information available on a specific topic based on a careful search of the medical literature. Because the results of individual research studies can be affected by many factors, combining results from different studies on the same topic can be helpful in reaching conclusions about the scientific evidence for preventing, diagnosing, or treating a particular disease.
- **Case conferences and case reports** may be published in medical journals to educate clinicians about particular illnesses and how to treat them.
- **Editorials** in medical journals are short essays that express the views of the authors, often regarding a research or review article published in the same issue. Editorials provide perspective on how the current article fits with other information on the same topic.
- **Letters to the editor** provide a way for readers of the medical journal to express comments, questions, or criticisms about articles published in that journal. Short research reports and case reports may also be published as letters to the editor.

## EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

Publications in medical journals are a major source of information for the improvement of medical care and for the continuing education of physicians and other health professionals. The evaluation and selection of articles for publication are important quality improvement processes that involve several stages.

- **Submission**—Authors preparing articles for submission to a medical journal should follow guidelines available for the content and format of specific types of articles.
- **Editorial review**—Journal editors assess submissions for overall quality and appropriateness for that journal.
- **Peer review**—Submissions that pass initial editorial review are sent for evaluation to experts who are “peers” of the authors regarding the topic of the submission.
- **Revision**—Submissions that have not been rejected after editorial or peer review are usually sent back to authors for revision based on recommendations from editors and peer reviewers, a process that may be repeated several times before acceptance for publication.
- **Publication**—All final decisions for publication are made by the journal editors.

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## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on basic science research was published in the April 3, 2002, issue; and one on medical research in the February 6, 2001, issue.

Source: *AMA Manual of Style*

