FROM THE EDITORS

Preface

Professionals in health-related fields are called to be lifelong learners, recognizing that new research continuously amends our understanding of disease processes and their management. Beyond the biomedical, our learning must encompass the unique challenges that affect our patients, shaped by the communities with which they identify. Our cover image (Ng) and a commentary on international relief work (Zubairi) encourage us to redefine the borders of our responsibility as healthcare providers. This year’s issue of the McMaster University Medical Journal (MUMJ) takes a broad look at the social and political context of health and disease, as we consider how to reflect its significance in our training.

One of our goals is to encourage learners to reflect on the social determinants of health. We feature an interview with Dr. Dennis Raphael, professor of health policy at York University and author of many works on the topic. MUMJ was also excited to collaborate with the Community Health Initiative for Medical Education (CHIME) for this year’s essay contest. The result of these efforts is a thoughtful discussion on how to incorporate socioeconomic variables into the medical curriculum (Raphael) and in the allocation of healthcare resources (Mulloy).

A number of our authors consider the role of public health initiatives in addressing systemic barriers to health. The impact of social context on alcohol-related violence is illuminated in a systematic review, along with suggestions for health policy changes to mitigate these destructive patterns (Heung et al.). One commentary offers lessons from the listeriosis outbreak, highlighting the infection control measures needed to protect vulnerable populations (Birk-Urovitz). Another essay discusses the implications of antimicrobial resistance (Tilak). Use of a clinical decision rule to guide the prescription of antibiotics in the emergency department is one strategy to slow the spread of resistant bacterial strains, while upholding judicious use of healthcare resources (Aaronson et al.).

How do future healthcare professionals learn to serve their patients on both an individual and population level? McMaster’s innovative approach to education fosters the lifelong learning needed to care for a community with diverse needs. Students take it upon themselves to develop norms in interprofessional teams (Chan S et al.), and also strive to shape their peers’ education through initiatives like a general surgery lecture series (Chan T et al.). Reading and contributing to academic journals is another way to connect with one’s colleagues. In this issue of MUMJ, McMaster trainees have authored clinical reviews of the diagnosis and management of sleep apnea (Au et al.) and stroke (Lu), as well as presenting interesting case reports (Mahe & Sur, Ng & Mejia).

Ultimately, patient values should guide our learning objectives, if we have the insight to ascertain them. This year’s Literature, the Arts and Medicine section features creative pieces by people experiencing palliative care (Huth & Sproat). The authors crystallize our awareness of how one’s psychosocial, cultural and spiritual milieu bears upon the experience of disease. Readers are also encouraged to develop their awareness of unique patient needs in a commentary on intellectual disability (Benassi).

We are excited to see MUMJ expanding, with an editorial board of 14 students and 20 faculty advisors selecting 19 articles for publication. We hope to continue to broaden our scope, by embracing a holistic approach to medicine and increasing interprofessional involvement in the Journal. Thank you to the authors, editors and our advisors for enabling us to publish articles that reflect the diverse interests and values of the McMaster healthcare community.

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