The Rise and Role of Medical Journalism in Victorian Britain

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The Rise of Medical Journalism

19th Century periodical publication explosion
479 medical periodicals launched in 19th century Britain

Types of medical periodical*
• **General** – for whole medical profession
• **Specialist** – groups within medical profession (pharmacists, dentists, psychiatrists)
• **Scientific** – high proportion of non clinical material (microscopy, anatomy, bacteriology).
• **Orthodox Health** periodicals - disseminating health information to the reading public (e.g. Anti-Tobacco Journal)
• **The Unorthodox** Journal – homeopathy, hydropathy.

The Role of Medical Journalism: Historiography

**Few works**

**Periodicals approached as passive sources**
- D.J. Weatherall: Periodicals hold the “potential to be a viable historical document”, if they have “an independent voice”. *Mirror of Medicine*, p. v.
- Michael Shepherd: “the content as well as the titles of psychiatric journals may be viewed as markers of developments in theory and opinion as well as providers of factual information and I shall treat them as such”. ‘Psychiatric Journals and the Evolution of Psychological Medicine’, in *Medical Journals and Medical Knowledge*. 
The Role of Medical Journalism: Historiography

Jean and Irvine Loudon:
• medical journals “are almost the only source on what really happened in the period of medical reform”, with the Transactions of the Associated Apothecaries providing “the only comprehensive account of events preceding and immediately following the Apothecaries Act of 1815”

Historiography surrounding Science Journalism in the 19th Century

Medical Journalism: an Active Presence

Questions
In what ways was medical journalism an active social force in Victorian Britain?
For what purposes – and with what effects – were medical periodicals published by editors and journalists?
For what purposes – and with what effects - were periodicals read by members of the medical profession and lay readers?

Areas:
• Campaigning: for/against the interests of the medical profession
• Medical education
• Shaping medical knowledge
• Advocating the medical fringe and the unorthodox
• Popularising medical knowledge for lay readerships
• Altering relationships between physicians and patients (readers).
Importance

• Expand upon the current historiography surrounding the medical press; build upon the view that periodicals are markers of change; place historiography on par with that surrounding scientific journalism

• Explore how periodical literature could be harnessed as an active social force in the Victorian era – by both journalists and readers

• Reflection upon how the impact of the internet as a new communications medium.