



Learning for Professional Practice

Using journal alerts to support your Continuing Professional Development

Abstract

There are many ways to keep up to date with research that affect your role and personal development. You can regularly use PubMed or Scholar to find recent papers using keyword search, you can rely on others to do the work for you with literature reviews, share the job with Journal clubs or using Journal alerts you can have the papers and research you want delivered to your inbox.

Introduction

If you have ever undertaken a research project you know how long, it takes to find all the references needed to support its development and writing up into a dissertation, paper for publication or development of a national guideline. What if instead of searching for new and additional references throughout the length of writing a literature review references came to you automatically. This is what journal alerts can do for you and your research.

Alerts are useful for your personal development, to support ongoing development of an area of practice, towards the development of a literature review for publication or research. Indeed, whenever you want to follow a theme in your research or keep up to date in an area of practice.

What are journal alerts?

Journals automatically create tables of contents for issues and the contents can be accessed through databases like PubMed, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> or via searches through Google Scholar, <https://scholar.google.co.uk/>. However, tables of contents with links to individual papers can also be sent directly to your e-mail inbox. An example from the Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine can be seen in Figure 1.

Some of the alerts are full contents of a journal issue, Figure 1, or with journals that first publish online before papers are combined into issues you often get an early preview of publications instead, see Figure 2. Using journal alerts is just the first step but a useful one to save you time updating a search for new references every month or year.

Alternatives to alerts for some specialisations are journals that cover recent developments in your subject e.g. Current Research in ---, Modern trends in -- -, Trends in --- . Similarly you can set-up search alerts for a subject area in Scholar, Web of Science and other databases.

Setting up journal alerts

It is best practice to set up journal alerts for those journals you use regularly and look to for support and ideas for your professional practice and continuing professional development. Some journals may directly relate to an area of clinical practice e.g. Dermatology,

Ophthalmology, Orthopaedics or you might be looking at specific tasks you get involved in e.g. developing learning materials so journals like Medical Teacher would be suitable.

There are a number of ways to set up journal alerts;

- Specific journals for example Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine
- If looking for a range of journals that apply to your subject, you may need to look across a number of publisher's alert services
- You can set subject areas for alerts rather than specific journals
- You can set up alerts for Tables of contents (TOCs), Searches, Citations and Authors.

There are many useful guides to using Journal alerts for example "Keeping your research current", <https://guides.library.uwa.edu.au/keepingresearchcurrent/journal-alerts>. One of the most useful services is provided by JournalTOCs, <http://www.journaltocs.ac.uk/>, which provides the latest Journal Table of Contents as a free service from 35,070 journals including 16,879 selected Open Access journals and 12,174 Hybrid journals (These journals are partly normal access and partly open access), from 3640 publishers.

Journal alerts have been shown to increase the awareness and familiarity with the journal and literature (Tanna 2011) and Kearney's research (2016) demonstrated the value of eTOCs as a means of increasing access to newly published literature.

To set up an alert for the Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine you need to go to the main journal page and click on 'New content alerts'. However, it is important to note that you need to be logged in, see Figure 3. To create an account, click on Register top right corner of the main page then you can log-in and create your alert.

Task 1 Select a journal or number of journals or subject areas to alert you to new papers

In the first instance to get used to Journal Alerts it might just be best to set-up any journal you subscribe to or that you regularly use or read.

Task 2 Alert review and further action

Here it is worthwhile asking yourself a number of questions;

- Looking at the alerts you have received how many papers have you followed up of interest to you?
- Did you look at papers faster than usual i.e. from early publications?
- Were there too many or too few alerts or relevant papers from your alerts?
- How many papers have you followed up and utilised in your CPD?
- Are you having difficulty accessing journals?

In thinking about your CPD make notes about the papers and their impact on your practice and on patients. If too many alerts, you can refine your subject area choice with a publisher to narrow down further. If too few alerts, you will need to either expand the number of journals, redefine the areas of coverage or use a wider collection from services like JournalTOCs.

As part of your work either in a University or NHS department you will need to connect up with your library services or talk to your librarian about how they can support your CPD through accessing journals.

References

Kearney, A., O'Hara, L. and McNicholas, F., 2016. Assessing the Effectiveness of eTOC alerts in the Dissemination of Newly Published Literature in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Specialist Library. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*, 16(2), pp.145-151.

Tanna, G.V., Sood, M.M., Schiff, J., Schwartz, D. and Naimark, D.M., 2011. Do e-mail alerts of new research increase knowledge translation? A "nephrology now" randomized control trial. *Academic Medicine*, 86(1), pp.132-138.

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