

Diplomate Perspectives



Inside the National Journal Club

April 2022

After overwhelmingly positive feedback from Diplomates who participated in the National Journal Club (NJC) Pilot, ABFM has upgraded the NJC to an enduring self-assessment activity, available to all board-certified Diplomates and residents in perpetuity with new updates provided twice each year.

Located within the MyABFM Portfolio, NJC allows Diplomates and residents to read the latest evidence-based articles that are methodologically rigorous, relevant to the practice of family medicine and have the potential to improve practice. In addition to reading the articles, family physicians have the opportunity to answer four brief questions per article which earn points toward their certification requirement and continuing medical education credit. This resource may also be a valuable tool for residency education.

“When family physicians, and physicians in-training, learn they can use research to help their patients, it’s very empowering.”

That’s Dr. Steven Brown, Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Arizona and co-creator of the American Family Physician podcast. He’s also a member of ABFM’s National Journal Club Committee, a group of 15 board-certified family physicians with expertise in evidence-based medicine who meet regularly to assist in crafting ABFM’s latest online self-assessment activity.

“When the committee meets, each physician brings articles to the table that we think may be interesting to the audience. We prioritize them as a group and write relevant questions for those with the highest group ranking,” Dr. Brown explained.

These articles, selected with permission from several of the nation’s leading medical journals, go through a multi-stage vetting process before they are officially published as part of the NJC. Once the pilot went live in August 2021, Dr. Brown had good reason to test it out.

“It just so happened that my recertification came up last year during the pilot program, so I gave the activity a try,” he said. “I thought the NJC platform did a nice job of being user friendly. For example, you can refer back to the article to help you answer questions, and the questions make an effort to highlight the important pieces of the article. I think it’s a very useful tool for teaching evidence-based medicine and making physicians more comfortable reading the primary literature.”

Dr. Stephen Wilson, also a member of the NJC Committee, serves as the Chair of the Department of Family Medicine at Boston University and is the Chief of Medicine at Boston Medical Center. Like Dr. Brown, he is an avid reader of medical literature. When the idea for an activity like NJC was first pitched to Dr. Wilson, he wasn’t quite convinced.



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Dr. Stephen Wilson

“I wasn’t sure if family medicine needed something like this. There were already resources available for most physicians. However, as I’ve become busier in my work, I see the inherent value in the National Journal Club. Selecting the top articles and placing them in one location offers family physicians a place to go and really learn on a deeper level. I think it adds a depth to the medical literature space which had previously been missing.”

Dr. Wilson mentioned that, in addition to using the NJC to fulfill his certification requirements, he’s gone back to the service as a resource for teaching family medicine residents as well.

“The articles that I see on the NJC list are key articles that are highly relevant and valid. ABFM is doing the work in seeking these articles out, so family physicians don’t have to. We’re looking for content that is going to either validate a clinical practice that exists OR informs us that maybe we need to do something different,” said Dr. Wilson. “I hope people try the Journal Club and give us feedback. I believe this could really make an impact on how physicians are providing patient care.”

ABFM feels the same. To celebrate the program’s success, we recently uploaded 47 new evidence-based articles to the NJC portfolio. We hope you’ll give the program a try and let us know what you think. Log into your MyABFM Portfolio to get started, or learn more by visiting www.theabfm.org/NJC.



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This article is part of ABFM’s ongoing ‘Diplomate Perspectives’ series in which family physicians will discuss programs which may positively affect their medical practices and their patients. Keep an eye out for future articles, as we’d love to have your perspective as well. Visit www.theabfm.org to learn more.