

Intended for healthcare professionals

History of The BMJ

The BMJ is one of the world's oldest general medical journals. It published its first weekly edition on 3 October 1840 as the **Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal** before uniting with the **London Journal of Medicine** and publishing from January 1853 as the **Associated Medical Journal**. Four years later in January 1857, this merged journal became the **British Medical Journal**. The title was shortened to **BMJ** in 1988, and then changed to **The BMJ** in 2014.



The first editors were [P. Hennis Green](#), lecturer on the diseases of children at the [Hunterian School of Medicine](#), and Robert Streeten of [Worcester](#), a member of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association council. In their introductory editorial Green and Streeten defined their two main objectives: the advancement of the profession... and the dissemination of medical knowledge.

To the left, you can see the cover of the **1st issue of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal**. That first issue was just 16 pages long and cost 7d, a price which remained until 1844. In their main article, Green and Streeten cheekily noted that their new journal had received as many advertisements as its most popular (unnamed) rival after seventeen years of existence. We can infer that the rival in question was *The Lancet*, launched in 1823.

Over the decades, news of many important medical advances was broken in the pages of the journal. In 1847/48, the *PMSJ* carried a number of [reports](#) from pioneering anaesthetist Sir James Young Simpson urging the adoption and correct preparation and administration of undiluted chloroform for maximum benefit. Twenty years later, in 1867, *The BMJ* published the first of many [seminal papers on antisepsis](#) by Joseph Lister.

In October 1948, *The BMJ* published the first centrally randomised controlled trial ('[Streptomycin Treatment of Pulmonary Tuberculosis](#)'--one of the authors being [FRG Heaf](#) of [Heaf Test](#) fame, which remained in use until 2005).

The journal also carried Richard Doll's [seminal papers](#) on the causal effects of smoking on lung cancer and other causes of death in 1950 and 1954.

The BMJ has been publishing a special "Christmas Edition" since 1982. This edition is known for research articles which apply a serious academic approach to investigating less serious medical questions. The results are often humorous and widely reported by the mainstream media.

The BMJ was the first major medical journal to launch a website, in 1995, and went fully online in 1998. For the first 10 years, the entire content of the journal was freely available online. Since then, the original research articles have remained freely available from the point of publication, adopting the CCBy Open Access principles in October 2014. From 2005, subscription access controls were gradually introduced for non-research articles. Since 2001 *The BMJ*

has allowed complete free access for visitors from economically disadvantaged countries as part of the World Health Organisation's [HINARI](#) initiative.

The BMJ's [full archive](#) from 1840's Volume 1, Issue 1 is available online in html or pdf format. *The BMJ* is now primarily an online journal, available at [bmj.com](#) and through its mobile app. Print editions include a magazine for UK-based doctors and a monthly Academic Edition for institutions, researchers and medical academics. In addition, a number of monthly editions of *The BMJ* are or have been published in English or in translation in Argentina, Greece, Romania, China and West Africa.

Reader feedback online is actively encouraged in the form of Rapid Responses which were introduced in 1998, and 20 years later, had generated 115,000 fully-moderated responses.

Timeline

The Editors of *The BMJ*

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This week's poll

Should medical students be encouraged to use generative artificial intelligence to study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

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