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Pushing the needle for equity and justice: Art and creative works take the stage at BMJ Leader

Ming-Ka Chan ,[1] Janice St. John-Matthews ,[2] Sian Reece ,[3] Rachel Gemine ,[4,5] Nagina Khan [6,7]

BMJ Leader's commitment to equity and social justice[1 2] as a leadership-focused journal has taken many paths, all providing incredible learning and opportunity, with some paths more circuitous than others. One such path was the addition of art and creative works as a submission type in the BMJ Leader Journal. Many might wonder why a journal rooted in science and scientific enquiry might go along this very different or even divergent path. For us, this path represents an expansion on how we view health and healthcare as both an art and a science. We believe that stories are a type of data or evidence, and we have already embraced forms of storytelling as a journal through *Leadership in the Mirror* and *Blog* publication types—stories about different domains of leadership and varied leadership journeys. As such, art and creative works simply provide the storyteller with more varied modalities to share their stories and inspire reflection (see figure 1). These stories will build the connectivity and offer opportunities for dialogue and debate that BMJ Leader has strived for as a key purpose. Understanding the story through art and creative works makes what we do richer and enhances engagement. It supports sharing through different forms of expression—such expansion of modalities achieves a goal of social justice and broadening participation. Ultimately, we believe that art and creative works will bring the humanity and social context of health and healthcare to life. It is through this engagement with the humanities—a way to build relationship-centredness that will foster creativity, critical thinking and compassionate leadership practices—all needed to advance social justice for all, across different contexts and cultures. After all, the key role of health professionals and learners is to help patients, care partners and communities share their stories in the context of their health and well-being. It is also through story that the health leaders (and followers) will understand and then act on behalf of the patients, care partners, communities, teams, learners, staff/employees, organisations, health systems and the planet.

Art and creative works came on board quietly in 2023 as the Art and Social Justice Blog series[3–5] and in 2024 as part of the *Leadership, EDI (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) and Social Justice in Times of Crisis* topic collection. Scholars have also been writing about art and leadership.[6 7] The pieces that were included were well received, and the community expressed interest in having art and creative works as a standing submission type. Given the ongoing work to apply a social justice lens to the content of the Journal, members of the editorial, fellow and publishing team started the work to fully launch art and creative works within BMJ Leader and create processes to value and celebrate these submissions. Such work included clear and transparent guidelines for submission and review, and communication strategies, both passive and active. The goal was to engage potential contributors and readers/viewers, recruit reviewers, and most importantly, co-create with those immersed in the arts and creative works space. Given the diversity of the art and creative works domain, careful feedback was solicited from members of different communities to ensure that the processes created were feasible and welcoming, while minimising barriers to submissions and reviews.

Such work is never done in isolation, and as the work progressed to launch art and creative works as a submission type, the team began to consider related components such as:

- Art and creative works as a research methodology
- Support and education for potential and existing reviewers
- Changes to create a more welcoming submission process and enhance diversity in the identities of contributors, and
- Ideas to showcase scholarly contributions in different ways.

These are only some of the paths that we are travelling, and we welcome feedback and ideas at info.bmjleader@bmj.com. How can BMJ Leader Journal best use art and creative works to advance its mission? How else could BMJ Leader Journal apply a social justice lens to its work? What else could BMJ Leader Journal do to strengthen the existing work towards equity and justice? Stay tuned to hear more, as equity and leadership remain a key theme for BMJ Leader—as part of the core content of what we publish and in the processes of what we do within the journal. You can sign up here to be kept up to date on the latest publications and news.

Figure 1 Words dancing through the pages.

Description: A calligram reflecting the work of BMJ Leader Journal and showcasing a different way to tell a story. Artist: Ms Wei-An Lau, medical student at University of Manitoba.

[1]Pediatrics and Child Health, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba (MB), Canada
[2]Allied Health Professions, NHS England, Newport, UK
[3]University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
[4]DHCW, National Health Service Wales Digital Health and Care Wales, Swansea, UK
[5]Swansea University, Swansea, UK
[6]Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK
[7]Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Headington, UK

Correspondence to
Dr Ming-Ka Chan; Ming-ka.Chan@umanitoba.ca

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ORCID iDs
Ming-Ka Chan https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2989-7766
Janice St. John-Matthews https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1303-4918
Sian Reece https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4563-6972
Rachel Gemine https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8425-7388
Nagina Khan https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3870-2609

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