

Article

# A Place to Meet: Community and Companionship in the *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women*, 1895–1905

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**Abstract:** At the turn of the twentieth century, British women were able to qualify as medical doctors and enter professional practice for the first time. However, they often remained excluded from the specialist journals which were crucial for knowledge exchange during this period. As a result, they formed several of their own periodicals, including the *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women* (1895–1947), which this paper discusses. Significantly, the *Magazine* not only provided female doctors with the opportunity for intellectual communication, but social interaction too. This paper will explore how the periodical regularly published community-building content, which emphasised friendship as a key component of female doctors' relationships. The *Magazine* encouraged the sharing of humour, stories, and intimate news which both articulated and generated companionship amongst subscribers. Through this content, the *Magazine* wove professional connections into personal bonds, telling a story of medical sisterhood and offering a welcoming textual meeting place to a disparate network of female doctors.

**Keywords:** *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women*; London School of Medicine for Women; medical women; female doctors; medical periodicals

## 1. Introduction

The turn of the twentieth century was a critical period in British medicine, when the role of women in the profession underwent a seismic shift. Numbers of female doctors grew enormously as women were able to become qualified practitioners for the first time: in 1881 there were only 25 women doctors qualified in Britain, but by 1911, there were 495 (Jefferson et al. 2015). Entering medical practice in the 1890s and 1900s, this new generation of female doctors faced unique challenges in a workplace recently open to them. Yet they have been significantly underrepresented in scholarship, which has focused on the initial fight for women to obtain a medical education (Burstyn 1980; Elston 1986; Bourdillon 1988; Blake 1990; Thomson 1998; Hardy and Conrad 2001; Crowther and Dupree 2007; Brock 2007; Rowold 2011). In particular, little is known about how early female doctors engaged in the intellectual exchange integral to medical practice, such as the sharing of clinical findings, professional news, and institutional gossip.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this took place primarily through written communication, and periodicals were an especially key part of medical professionals' lives (Bynum et al. 1992; Peterson 1994; Csiszar 2018; Dawson et al. 2020; Moulds 2021; Frampton and Wallis 2021). However, the periodical writing of female doctors is crucially missing from studies of this period. This is a significant gap in knowledge as it was only at this time that women were able to contribute to published medical discourse, and periodicals in particular, as they had previously been barred from doing so by the societies and organisations which ran them. Although medical women did write for existing medical journals, they still faced marginalisation in their attempts to integrate into mainstream professional publications. In response to these challenges, they published a number of their own periodicals, intended for a readership of fellow female doctors and medical students.



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This article focuses on one such periodical, the *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women* (1895–1947), discussing its development during the first decade of its publication until 1905. As its title suggests, the *Magazine* was the publication of the London School of Medicine for Women, an institution central to the changes happening in the medical profession. Established in response to the difficulty women faced in obtaining a medical education from existing colleges and universities, the LSMW was the first (and for many years, the only) medical school in Britain open to female students (Witz 1992; McIntyre 2014). The *Magazine* was primarily aimed at the school's pupils and alumni, but as these formed a high percentage of the total number of female medical graduates during these early years, in practice, the periodical was read by a large portion of women doctors in Britain. It was thus an important publication, attracting over 400 subscribers by 1908 (Brock 2014).

Significantly, the *Magazine's* importance lay not only in the opportunities it gave women to share their clinical knowledge, but in the sense of community it provided during a critical period in which increasing numbers of women were entering medical practice. Scholars such as Claire Brock (2014) and Kristin E. Kondrlik (2017) have focused on the importance of the *Magazine* in providing a separate professional space for early medical women, showing how the periodical helped establish a collective identity for female doctors which was distinct from the profession as a whole. Kondrlik has usefully demonstrated how the *Magazine* was instrumental in defining the character and role of the woman doctor, through fostering 'fellow feeling' and shared 'traits, norms, and values' amongst readers (Kondrlik 2017, p. 494). This cultivated a sense of professional 'collectivity' amongst medical women and helped to form a 'counterpublic' useful as a defence against opposition from the male establishment (Kondrlik 2017, p. 494).

This article builds on these studies to argue that, further to the periodical's role as a locus of professional selfhood, it offered women a vital experience of camaraderie and social exchange. Significantly, the 'fellow feeling' which Kondrlik identifies has a personal dimension that goes beyond the promotion of common values and professional purpose. In particular, throughout its first ten years in print, the *Magazine* published a large volume of material designed to encourage a sense of sociability and friendliness amongst its readership. Whilst intersecting with readers' medical interests, this content focused on building an affective relationship between subscribers. Importantly, much of this community-minded content is unique to the *Magazine* and is more informal than the material found in male student medical periodicals at the turn of the twentieth century. This is key for our understanding of women-run medical publications from this period.

This article will explore how this informal material, in combination with the periodical's form as a serial publication, both articulated and established companionship between its readers. It will discuss two key features of the *Magazine's* content: the use of humour and readers' literary contributions. The key attributes of the periodical form—written communication produced regularly and circulated widely—were recognised by the editors of the *Magazine* as useful for stimulating friendly conversation as well as intellectual debate. Crucially, the *Magazine* created a sisterhood of medical women that was based not only on professional relationships but on personal bonds, woven through the experience of sharing and reading. These bonds had an intimate and supportive quality, characterised by mutual 'sympathy' (Scharlieb 1902, p. 53).

The periodical had an active role in shaping this community. Its companionable content told a story of warmth and emotional solidarity and positioned this as central to relationships between female doctors. Its form was vital in facilitating these relationships. The *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women* provided a virtual social space, a textual meeting place, for a disparate network of early female doctors, many of whom were practising in isolation amongst male colleagues or in far flung corners of the world. This was sorely needed at a time in which medical women often faced hostility in their careers.

## 2. A Community of 'Dear Friends'

The *Magazine* did publish content related to the practice of medicine. Clinical reports and case histories shared medical knowledge amongst the readers of the magazine and notices discussed new technologies in patient care. However, these articles formed only around a third of each number's total content. The rest of the material published by the *Magazine* can be categorised as community-building in nature. Some of this content replicated that found in mainstream medical periodicals during this period, for example, reports of councils, committees, and societies; correspondence pages; school and hospital news; and notices of appointments. However, much was specific to the *Magazine* and focused on topics of interest to the 'medical woman': articles campaigning for greater opportunities for female doctors or reporting new developments in the cause sat alongside first-person accounts of medical women doing their jobs around the world. These articles bolstered women's sense of professionalism and, as Brock (2014) and Kondrlik (2017) have described, drew readers together into a community of practitioners with shared goals and experiences.

Alongside the articles emphasising women's professional bonds, the *Magazine* also published content designed to foster personal closeness between the periodical's readers: poems; humorous articles; general interest pieces about holidays or medical trips members of the school had been on; and jolly reports of class activities. These ranged from the informal and informative 'A Chat About India' (D.Y. 1900), published in 1900, to the downright amusing 'Clippings from Schoolboys' Answers' (*The University Correspondent* 1896), a list of hilariously erroneous exam responses, published in 1896. Such material was of course intended to be entertaining and enjoyable to consume, but these articles also served as social communication between readers. Often framed as intentionally directed towards other pupils and alumni, this content was a public sharing of friendly news and intimate experiences. Authors frequently drew explicit ties of companionship between themselves and the reader, extending bonds of friendship formed during school days into the textual and temporal space of the *Magazine*.

That the *Magazine* was expressly intended for the purpose of drawing together the various students and graduates of the school is clear from the first editorial, published in 1895, which expressed the 'desire to promote fellow feeling among the different sections of our school, and to link together past and present students' (Anon 1895b, p. 4). Indeed, the editors 'cordially' invited 'letters and papers from former students, telling of their doings, medical or otherwise' (Anon 1895b, p. 4). The pages of the periodical are here constructed as a community noticeboard, through which members might keep in touch with each other. Importantly, the kind of news that was desired was not only the successful performance of 'difficult surgical operations' but also 'delightful holidays in the Himalayas' (Anon 1895b, p. 4). The communication encouraged between medical women was of a professional *and* personal character. These sentiments were reiterated in a note from the editor in 1897, requesting 'more contributions' from 'present students, not necessarily on medical subjects, but on subjects of outside interest, too' (Anon 1897, p. 250).

For many of the LSMW graduates who subscribed to the *Magazine*, the periodical would have been the primary site in which they could reach and interact with a community of fellow medical women. In the late nineteenth century, there were no professional organisations for female doctors outside of the few medical schools devoted to women's education. Although women began to be admitted to existing medical societies in the 1890s (such as the British Medical Association in 1892), they were heavily outnumbered by their male colleagues. Women were also largely excluded from hospital positions, as these involved the treatment of male patients. As Mary Ann C. Elston describes, until 1914 the primary appointments for female doctors were in 'sexually segregated public institutions, in a few voluntary hospitals for women and children, and in [the] few hospitals run by the women themselves' (Elston 1986, p. 233). Many female doctors therefore worked alone as general practitioners or took up posts across the British Empire, rather than face uncertain chances in direct competition with their male colleagues (Hassan 2011; Ingram 2015).

Working in these roles, female doctors were distanced from those with whom they had trained and often had little society with other medical women. The *Magazine* facilitated this communication as readers could engage with other female doctors and students, either interactively through the correspondence pages and by sending in contributions to the periodical, or through the experience of consuming and relating to the content shared in each number. In publishing news related to the private activities and personal experiences of readers, the *Magazine* ensured that subscribers built an affectionate rapport. This was perhaps particularly valuable to women experiencing the loneliness of working in isolation. That many of the periodical's readers did find affective relationships through the *Magazine* is evidenced by the endearments which pepper the letters sent to the editor. One reader, Lille E. V. Savile, wishing to 'send a greeting' to 'my dear friends,' finds the '*RFH Magazine* will be the best medium to do so' (Savile 1901, p. 745).<sup>1</sup> 'It is good,' she says, to 'once more shake hands in this way across the waste of waters' (Savile 1901, p. 748). Here is an example of a female doctor who has taken up one of such posts across the British Empire, and who is using the *Magazine* to stay in touch with the community she built during her time at the LSMW. Savile's letter is sent from her station in Peking, where she was held under siege during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. As she remarks, 'it will be some time before life is sufficiently leisured to communicate personally with one's friends' (Savile 1901, p. 745).

Savile expresses a clear desire to stay connected with other medical women on an emotional and intimate level: they are more than simply colleagues. Indeed, a letter to the editor from Mary Scharlieb is evidence of the personal support which subscribers offered one another: she expresses her 'gratitude for all the kind sympathy' received from readers during her illness. These well-wishes, she says, 'went far to help us bear what was in many ways a trial' (Scharlieb 1902, p. 53). There is also a strong emphasis on socialising amongst students and graduates of the school. As another reader writes:

I shall feel it a very great and real pleasure to hear of all the doings at the old familiar places, and now that a cup of tea and some gossip in the Students' Room are no longer possible for me, I shall welcome all the more this further opportunity of meeting with and hearing of old chums and fellow-students, new and old, in the pages of the magazine. (Anon 1895a, p. 86)

Having happily received 'a copy of the *LSMW School and Hospital Magazine*' for the first time, this reader has welcomed the chance to learn of the goings-on of her fellow medical women (Anon 1895a, p. 86). Significantly, she does not note the clinical or intellectual merit of the publication but focuses instead on its value as a source of pleasure and entertainment. Both readers speak of the school and the *Magazine* in the fondest terms and, importantly, in terms of personal warmth. The bonds here are of friendship, rather than professional allegiance, and the emphasis is on the social experiences of the readers: the chance for a 'cup of tea and some gossip' (Anon 1895a, p. 86) and to 'shake hands' (Savile 1901, p. 748). Our reader acknowledges the periodical's use for the sharing of titbits amongst colleagues, a practice which recreates a sense of the 'old familiar' relationships built at school (Anon 1895a, p. 86). As Claire Brock has demonstrated, early female doctors felt the absence of community spirit after graduation and over the first decades of the *Magazine*'s publication there were 'repeated calls for unity' from readers (Brock 2014, p. 155). It is evident that medical women were seeking to build these bonds through connecting with one another in the pages of the periodical, with new readers able to recognise the social nature of the *Magazine*'s content.

The *Magazine* provided the space in which this friendship could be enacted. These readers identify the periodical as the medium through which they can communicate with geographically distant 'old chums' (Anon 1895a, p. 86). Indeed, LSMW alumni E. B. Meakin even uses the periodical to respond, wholesale, to the 'very many letters' she has received 'from old fellow students' (Meakin 1904, p. 406). Not having 'had time to answer them' due to her busy work schedule, Meakin writes into the *Magazine* to tell 'what experience has fallen to my lot during the last year' (Meakin 1904, p. 406). For these women, the *Magazine* served as a replacement for face-to-face conversation. Receiving the periodical

by post and responding through its correspondence pages allowed them to simulate the companionship they enjoyed during their student years. The *Magazine*, by its very nature as a serial publication, offered the opportunity for continual connection through regular communication. The 'pages of the magazine' were a place to meet, where letters, news, and experiences could be exchanged in a similar (if slower) manner to the Students' Room chats described by our reader (Anon 1895a, p. 86).

Significantly, the periodical form allowed for exchange to occur through the contributions readers sent into the *Magazine*, as well as their correspondence. The recurrent, triannual pace of the *Magazine's* publication schedule facilitated a dialogic sharing of personal news, that mimicked the give and take of social intercourse. Sharing news was a vital source of connection for female doctors working alone, both in GP practices around Britain and posts across the Empire. The *Magazine* acknowledged the geographic diffusion of its readers and encouraged subscribers to submit tales of their personal and professional adventures overseas. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, in her position of editor, wrote in 1901 that 'it would be very interesting to us at home if the medical women who are practicing abroad would each send a short report of her work' (Garrett Anderson 1901, p. 839). Even readers simply 'settled in country practices' thought that it would be 'stimulating to compare notes as to practice and prospects' (Anon 1902c, p. 52). Travelogues appear so regularly during the early years of the *Magazine* that the sharing of news from abroad can be said to be one of the periodical's chief selling points for its audience. Subscribers were evidently keen to form lines of contact amongst themselves, suggesting that they lacked supportive relationships in their places of work. Following fellow readers' news must have eased the loneliness of life as a medical woman.

Indeed, these articles, often written in first-person narrative prose and employing a chatty tone, give the impression of sharing one's latest exploits amongst friends. In 1895, A.M.C wrote of her 'Experiences at the Pasteur Institute', having been asked to share 'some account of my course of work' (A.M.C. 1895, p. 112). Doing so 'gladly,' both because 'it is good to dwell on a pleasant chapter of one's life' and 'because my doing so will show others how easily they may enjoy the same privilege,' the author describes in an energetic fashion how she was admitted to study at the Institute against the odds (A.M.C. 1895, p. 112). 'After several times screwing up my courage to the sticking point, only, like Bob Acres, to find it oozing out at my fingertips,' she at last manages to secure a place, as another student failed to appear (A.M.C. 1895, p. 112). Readers of the periodical understood these little memoirs to be in essence communicative; an offer of helpful advice to other medical women but also a 'general invitation' for others to send stories in exchange (Robinson 1899, p. 519).

The periodical also gained subscriptions over time and grew from a student-focused publication with a circulation directly related to the LSMW, gaining a global readership of medical women beyond those who were graduates of the school. Kondrlik has noted that the *Magazine* served 'as a site where a growing number of women doctors could come together in ways not possible in private correspondence, print venues aimed at the general public, or journals catering to male medical professionals' (Kondrlik 2017, p. 493). Although Kondrlik is discussing the periodical in the context of female doctors' professional relationships, she has usefully highlighted how the simultaneously private and public nature of the *Magazine* allowed a community to form. The *Magazine* was private in the sense that it was a periodical specifically intended for a readership of female doctors and not read widely outside of this group. This narrow audience ensured that contributors could feel relaxed enough to share informal content without concerns about upholding a professional reputation in front of male colleagues or hostile members of the public. However, as a published form of communication, the *Magazine* shared this informal content with multiple readers in multiple locations, at the same time. The periodical thus facilitated a web of friendly interactions between these readers, allowing relationships to form amongst the whole group as well as between individuals. The combination of the *Magazine's* private and public characteristics therefore established personal bonds between a large circle of women

brought together through professional connections; the periodical essentially developing a social network amongst medical women.

There was a clear editorial and readerly intention to make use of the periodical form to cultivate a space in which medical women could maintain and build emotionally intimate connections with each other. Although by the late nineteenth century the periodical was well established as a useful tool for the professional exchange of medical knowledge, the editors and subscribers of the *Magazine* recognised its value for companionship, too. It is worth noting that in providing opportunities for reader bonding and reader contributions, the *Magazine* responded to (as well as shaped) the tastes of its target audience. This kind of editorial strategy is characteristic of the New Journalism of the period. The personal character of the *Magazine* can therefore also be understood in relation to the development of new types of periodical at the turn of the twentieth century; particularly the specialised women's press, in its recognition of a female readership with distinct tastes (Wiener 1988; Jackson 2001; Tusan 2005). Indeed, the *Magazine's* regular content also made an important contribution to this sense of community. The *Magazine* took an active part in creating these friendships through curating articles which emphasised closeness and fondness between female doctors, publishing genres not usual for a professional journal. Apparent in many numbers of the periodical, and most strikingly different from other medical publications from this period, is the use of humour.

### 3. Sharing a Joke

The *Magazine* frequently published humorous content. Perhaps taking an unexpected tone within a professional periodical, the editors nonetheless appear to have strongly encouraged contributions which gave the *Magazine* a jovial character. This comedic material ranged from satirical pieces on school life to humour centred on medical topics. A genre of article which often recurred was the medical jokes page. These articles featured a series of one-liners on a variety of subjects relating to clinical work and are an example of the *Magazine's* use of topical humour to entertain readers. They provided comedic value through the readership's shared medical knowledge and professional experiences. The jokes were either formulated by the author or were (apparently) reports of amusing things which patients had been overheard to say, in the latter case, the comedy lying in the misunderstandings which the patients made. A particularly good example of this is the following, published in an article from 1905 titled 'What's in a name? Or Medicine as she is spoke':

The man who remarked to the resident: 'It's awful, doctor, to think I shall have this trouble every year.' The resident looked mystified until it dawned upon him that the diagnosis of perianal abscess had been misread as "perennial". (Anon 1905b, p. 493)

Here the reader is invited to chuckle at the patient's confusion, the similarity of the two words inducing the man to make a malapropism funny enough to raise any doctor's 'feelings from the depths of despair' (Anon 1905b, p. 491). The joke is successful as the reader, well versed in clinical language, understands the term 'perianal' to refer to the unfortunate location of the patient's ailment, rather than its likelihood of returning (Anon 1905b, p. 493).

Significantly, the medical jokes page turned the professional into the personal. The medical knowledge of both the author and reader, usually the professional currency which enabled clinical findings to be relayed and professional identity to be reiterated, becomes the source of shared humour. Such articles were intended as entertainment and provided social rather than intellectual exchange. Within the pages of the *Magazine*, subscribers could look forward to finding amusing content written by fellow female doctors, which they enjoyed and which they could relate to as medical women. Circulated amongst a specific readership likely to understand the joke, this topical comedy functioned to draw readers together, highlighting common ground and shared tastes arising from women's professional association.

Medical comedy also appeared in prose form within the periodical, as in the work of short fiction titled 'The Tables Turned', published in an earlier number from the same year (Anon 1905a). The story recounts a discussion between various objects commonly found within a hospital, as they come to life after-hours on New Year's Eve. The P.M. (or post mortem) table, the operating table, and other items of surgical equipment are anthropomorphised as they discuss the 'doings of the past year' (Anon 1905a, p. 446). It turns out that the P.M. table has seen less business than usual, owing to the operating table being 'half as responsible' for its work this year as 'hitherto' (Anon 1905a, p. 446). Whether this is due to the skill of the doctors or owing to the rather more humdrum nature of recent surgical cases, is left open to conjecture. As with the medical jokes page, readers needed to be in on the joke: references to the behaviour of the 'steel grooved director', who is indignant at being left out of proceedings for a 'lucifer match and dermatitis artefactum', could only be found amusing by those with sufficient medical training and experience in the operating room (Anon 1905a, p. 447). In this case, a modern surgical tool for probing body cavities, suggestive of use in abdominal surgery, is too often replaced by a simple flame providing light enough for an external examination of a skin complaint. Plenty of the comedy of this article is obscure even to a modern reader armed with research capabilities; clearly the jokes were intended for a particular clique of women with shared experiences of clinical instruction under the LSMW. In both the articles discussed here, humour serves to delineate and reinforce a sense of community.

Indeed, humour is even woven into the *Magazine's* content not explicitly intended for comedic purposes. This gave the periodical an informal and relaxed feel, and especially emphasised the camaraderie between readers. Many of the travelogues, recounting medical women's experiences abroad, are written with a light-hearted flair. 'Holiday Jottings', for example, dramatises a trip taken by subscribers, humorously introducing the:

*Dramatis Personae*—two harassed people not unknown at LSMW; one harassed by reason of a guilty conscience in not having already sent an elegant and learned discourse, according to a promise to the Editors; the other harassed by the adventures of her party. (Anon 1902b, p. 100)

Setting the scene in this way and making a witty reference to the article not exactly representing the most intellectual of offerings to the *Magazine*, the author indicates to the reader that entertaining antics are sure to be relayed. Likewise, much of the periodical's content discussing school and hospital affairs is written in a cheerfully satirical tone and is evidently intended to charm the reader as well as impart institutional news. In 1905, the *Magazine* published an article titled 'The Qualified vs. the Unqualified', by an anonymous author: 'Our Special Correspondent' (Our Special Correspondent 1905). The article reports on a hockey match between the (unqualified) female students of the LSMW and the (qualified) male doctors of the Royal Free Hospital. This report provides a helpful example of the intimate character of much of the content of the *Magazine*, and in particular, the regular use of amusing anecdotes, which create the companionable impression of being amongst friends.

Describing the match in avid detail, the Special Correspondent writes with tongue-in-cheek wit of the ladies' team, recounting how they 'figuratively pawed the ground in their wild impatience,' or 'at least it seemed so, but quite possibly they only wanted to keep warm' (Our Special Correspondent 1905, p. 422). The daring-do of the students is emphasised by their dazzling uniform of 'golden stripes' marking some (as yet unidentified) 'previous glory,' which contrasts with the 'mixed lot' of the men's costume (Our Special Correspondent 1905, p. 423). One of the men's team, the Correspondent jokes, even 'wore splints': surely an indication that he 'had played against a women's team before' (Our Special Correspondent 1905, p. 423). These sarcastic asides to the reader create a sense of riotous fun and paint the ladies' team as something of a menace on the hockey field. Indeed, their skill in play is nothing short of magical—'a flash of light. A puff of smoke'—a goal is scored (Our Special Correspondent 1905, p. 424). But there is nothing miraculous here: 'Lady Nicotine had served the students well' (Our Special Correspondent 1905, p. 424). Here, the

LSMW students are imagined cleverly utilising one of the tropes of New Womanhood, a chicly lit cigarette, to bamboozle their male opponents and gain the match.

The Correspondent plays with familiar stereotypes of the emancipated woman to stage a self-reflexive creation of shared identity. Through the narration of this fantastical tale of unusual hockey strategy, the correspondent tells a kind of in-joke, gently poking fun at the fashionable modernity of the school's students. Throughout the article, the students are identified by their physical and mental rigour, their pleasing appearance in modern clothing ('short skirts'), and their modern behaviours ([Our Special Correspondent 1905](#), p. 423). These were all the hallmarks of the ideal fin-de-siècle New Woman, and the students and graduates of the LSMW are clearly distinguished here as members of this group ([Ledger 1997](#); [Richardson and Willis 2002](#)). Relating the story of the match as if to a friend who could not attend, the Correspondent takes pride in this identity. Drawing the reader in with boisterous humour, she invites them to laugh along, and identify with, these strong, carefree women.

The informal approach of both editors and contributors to the *Magazine* is quite different from other medical journals published at the turn of the twentieth century. Whilst other student and hospital medical magazines from this period, such as the *Guy's Hospital Gazette* (1872–present) and *St. Mary's Hospital Gazette* (1895–1998), feature content of an extra-curricular nature, including reports from trips abroad and accounts of team sports matches, these lack the personable quality of the *Magazine*. Instead, the *Gazettes* sought to uphold a strong sense of professionalism. Keir [Waddington \(2002\)](#) has shown how, in the early Victorian period, doctors held a low status in British society and were often seen as money-grubbing and ignorant. Medical students were viewed as a social menace, with a reputation ranging from rowdy schoolboys with a drinking problem, to men engaged in outright criminal activity. Doctors in the latter half of the nineteenth century were keen to improve the poor reputation of medical practitioners and 'sought to adopt the language and status of the professional gentleman': 'character, breeding, and a cultured education were believed to be vital to a successful medical career' ([Waddington 2002](#), p. 49). Medical schools therefore disciplined their pupils to act accordingly, and attempts were made to reinvent the louche student's image. By the 1890s, Waddington claims, 'most medical students were now portrayed as industrious and gentlemanly' ([Waddington 2002](#), p. 50). Crucially, the medical student became the 'professional, surrounded by books, working rather than drinking late into the night' ([Waddington 2002](#), p. 50). It is likely that male student medical periodicals, both an important public relations tool and a useful site for the formation of a (newly refined) collegiate identity, deemed it necessary to demonstrate professionalism in all areas.

Indeed, sporting teams were seen as a useful way in which male medical students could participate in a robust collegial society. Take, for example, a report of a school cricket match in the June 1901 number of the *St. Mary's Hospital Gazette*:

The wicket was playing badly, and Stanger-Leathes in particular was bumping very awkwardly. Hobbs was hit and had to retire with only 2 to his credit, and with Cheatle playing on at 26, and Worthington caught and bowled without scoring, our prospects were none too rosy. Normal, too, got a nasty one on the point of the jaw, and though he continued his innings, played below his usual form. ([Anon 1901a](#), p. 97)

Although the report has a similar colloquial tone to the work of 'Our Special Correspondent,' the focus remains on the action of play and the score. There is no intention to include the reader in a sense of belonging, or ownership over the team, no jokes directed at the audience. Indeed, sports reports for cricket, football, and cycling were regular features of the *Gazette*, appearing in every number with the primary purpose of keeping readers informed of the hospital team's games and statistics. The emphasis here is on competition. Readers of the *Gazette* are allied with their school's team, and winning benefits the reputation of the whole community. This reflects the other content of the periodical, which promoted a communal identity based on achievements and successes (such as research

findings and medical appointments), rather than affective relationships. The LSMW's periodical offered readers a very different flavour of publication. Like the *Gazette*, the *Magazine* was the mouthpiece of a professional institution, but the periodical defined its purpose as offering a welcoming and cheerful space for medical women to connect with one another.

Significantly, much of the *Magazine's* comedic content can be described as professionally adjacent: the entertainment the *Magazine* offered was often based on medical topics or discussions of school and hospital life, but nonetheless, did not actually contribute to the professional development or clinical knowledge of the periodical's readers. The *Magazine* leveraged female doctors' professional relationships to encourage fondness between subscribers by sharing content that, whilst based on the common experiences of medical practitioners, was of a primarily social nature. Readers wrote in with funny stories, or simply consumed and related to the periodical's amusing articles, and this gave the *Magazine* an informal and intimate character.

#### 4. Imagining the Bonds of Intimacy

Another key feature of the *Magazine* which gave readers the opportunity to form these connections was through the sharing of amateur literary work within the periodical. Throughout the first decade of its publication, the *Magazine* regularly published poetry, short stories, and (as we have seen above) humorous sketches written by its readers. These literary submissions were largely topical in nature, discussing both medical practice and school life. Indeed, amateur literary offerings were common across student medical periodicals at the turn of the century, especially the publication of poems which translated medical matters into verse. These poems combined the clinical and literary skills of the author, both charming readers and contributing to the cultured professional identity of late nineteenth-century doctors.

Alison Moulds has shown how a historic relationship between the pursuit of medicine and literature ensured that 'practitioners were actively involved in textual production' not only as editors and contributors to journals but as authors of literary works (Moulds 2021, p. 1). This relationship can be traced back to the Elizabethan era and a 'range of men whose careers spanned medical and literary endeavours' (Moulds 2021, p. 6). As Moulds demonstrates, medical practitioners recognised the role of literature 'in mediating medicine's public image and shaping professional identities' (Moulds 2021, p. 8). Participating in literary writing 'was regarded as an important aspect of self-fashioning,' and in particular 'as a way of demonstrating one's gentlemanly qualities' (Moulds 2021, p. 8). The refinement suggested by the ability to elegantly engage the imaginative and generative skills of the writer 'remained central to cultural capital' (Moulds 2021, p. 8). This, as Moulds points out, was especially 'important for general practitioners and surgeons, who were still divesting themselves of their old associations with trade' (Moulds 2021, p. 8. See also: Hunter 1991; Charon 2001; Hurwitz 2017; Altschuler 2018).

Topical poetry was a regular feature in both the *Guy's Hospital Gazette* and *St. Mary's Hospital Gazette* at the turn of the twentieth century (*Guy's* having a weekly publication schedule and *St Mary's* a monthly). Subjects ranged from school sports to medical diagnoses. In March 1901, for example, *St. Mary's* published 'The Final Cup Tie', a reader's poem about the hospital team's football match (Anon 1901c, p. 41). In May 1902, 'Combative Cocci', a rhyme about the behaviour of *Coccus* bacterium within the body, appeared (Anon 1902a, p. 71). These literary offerings also dealt with scenes familiar to the students at the medical schools, turning common experiences into verse and helping to form a sense of shared identity amongst medical men. For example, in the 16 February 1901, number of *Guy's*, the periodical published 'The Alley'. This amateur poem grumbles good-naturedly about the conditions of the staff rooms at the hospital:

There is a street in the House of Guy,  
Or rather alley, I should say,

For alley's the name that suits it best;  
 And tis' the place where the night nurses rest.  
 The alley is narrow, the roof is low,  
 And through the casement the wind doth blow. (Anon 1901b, p. 74)  
 The poem then reminds readers, rather sardonically, that they have much to be grateful for:  
 Never you mind if the rain pours in,  
 And the alley seems cold and the blankets seem thin,  
 For you've plenty of work, what can you want more?  
 And pork pie and sausage, I'm sure you've galore. (Anon 1901b, p. 74)

Depicting medical students as long-suffering and hard-working—trudging through night shifts in uncomfortable surroundings—the poet fashions an honourable identity for the profession and its pupils. Students are (supposedly) willing to put up with napping in a windy alley because of their noble calling to medicine. Significantly, this identity fashioning is inward-facing. Intended for the readers of the periodical (the students and doctors at Guy's Hospital), the poem is only comprehensible to those who share the experiences of the writer. Rather than a public defence of the profession, it functions to shape medical men's sense of self. As Waddington (2002) has highlighted, practices of self-regulation were vital to the professionalisation of medicine in the late nineteenth century. In the *Gazette*, poetry provided a small moment of approved leisure amidst the periodicals' more studious content and reinforced the medical students' own sense of their cultural capital, demonstrating the refined tastes of medical men.

The *Magazine's* poetic offering is similar in content to that published in the *Gazette*, often featuring jolly verses poking fun at student life, alongside poems which instruct the reader how to diagnose patients' illnesses. For example, 'General Paralysis of the Insane', by L. M. Tyler, teaches readers about the clinical signs present in sufferers of the disease:

G.P.I.,  
 Mind his eye:  
 Accommodations sluggish grow;  
 Pupils should unequal show. (Tyler 1902, p. 104)  
 The poem also features the pathology seen at the postmortem:  
 Last, P.M., from thickened tissues,  
 Skull and meninges, there issues  
 Damaged brain, with nerve cells weird,  
 Neuclei all lost, or bleared. (Tyler 1902, p. 104)

In common with the literature published in other student medical periodicals, this poem is topical and aimed at a professional audience, featuring anatomical terminology like 'meninges' and 'neuclei' (Tyler 1902, p. 104). Expertise is required to understand and enjoy the poem. Each stanza demonstrates the patient's progression through each stage of the disease, from loss of gross motor skills ('Drunk?—Not now!—this is G.P.') to neurological symptoms ('Grandiose delusions shows') (Tyler 1902, p. 104). The author's skill in conveying the knowledge needed for accurate diagnosis, through verse, is intended to delight and appeal to the medical reader. However, coupled with the *Magazine's* other informal content, poems like Tyler's contribute to a sense of the periodical as a publication intended for the leisurely enjoyment of subscribers. Sitting alongside general interest articles, humorous pieces, and medical women's accounts of their travels, poetry (even on medical topics) becomes part and parcel of a package of entertainment. Additionally, in the case of the *Magazine*, all the poems published are sent in by readers of the periodical. The

work of students and graduates of the LSMW, these amateur verses are a hobby shared companionably amongst school fellows. There is fun to be had in turning the learnings of lectures into rhyme and metre and reading how friends have done the same.

In addition to poetry, the *Magazine* published literary writing in other genres, such as fiction. This was much less usual for medical periodicals from this period. Unlike the *Gazette*, the *Magazine* frequently published readers' short stories. These stories, tending to cover a few pages, were written in a similar tone to the periodical's other light-hearted general interest articles. Significantly, they were tales which specifically imagined a community of medical women associated with the school, and which highlighted the personal closeness between them. Authors often set their fiction on school premises and wrote about recognisable figures within the staff or student body. Utilising nicknames, impressions, and hyperbolic characterisation, readers' short stories develop a private humour between the *Magazine's* subscribers, where intimate knowledge of staff and pupils forms the basis of the joke. Crucially, these stories articulated a world where affectionate companionship was integral to professional life.

In a story titled 'Natural History', published in 1900, a student offers a fictionalised classification of the 'species' found at the LSMW. Giving each type a faux Latin name, the author describes the key characters from around the school. There is the 'Dousec or Noaboutit,' a 'clever little animal' which 'knows all about the times of everythink' and has a 'normous appetite for money' that is 'extra big at the beginning of term' (evidently a wry reference to a staff member in charge of fees and admissions) (Anon 1900, p. 642). There is also the 'Williball or Hokicappen,' a 'very energetic little animal' that 'loves to get a ball and a stick and run about with them,' and might 'hit [...] you very hard' if 'you try to take the ball away from it' (Anon 1900, p. 642). The 'Planelapon or Scoolrep is a bossy little animal, but it does it so nicely that you don't mind' (Anon 1900, p. 643), and the *Magazine's* own 'Scoolsubbedditter' is 'always so hungry'; you must 'be kind and feed it sometimes' (Anon 1900, pp. 643–44).

These amusing characterisations depict real women whom readers are expected to be familiar with from their time at the school, either personally as current pupils, or as recognisable archetypes from past student days. In either case, the story assumes readerly familiarity with goings-on at the LSMW. However, it also cultivates a sense of belonging amongst subscribers, emphasising the closeness of LSMW medical women through amplifying and articulating a community with distinctly social reference points. 'Species' are not known for their prowess in the operating room, or knowledge of disease pathology. Instead, it is their personal qualities which are of significance, whether they are 'bossy' or 'energetic' (Anon 1900, pp. 642–43). Yet, despite riffing on the private details of student relationships— such as the disorganisation of the 'Taylorbird, who is always awfully sorry, speshally when you have arranged to do somethink with it and it does not turn up'— the story was published and circulated amongst the *Magazine's* hundreds of subscribers (Anon 1900, p. 643).

Notwithstanding this large number of readers, the companionable in-jokes of such amateur literary submissions evoke the sensation of being part of a clique, conjuring an imagined world in which subscribers shared much closer bonds than they likely did in real life. With the school as the setting and its members as the subject, 'Natural History' skilfully extends the feeling of friendship which many would have experienced during their student days into the perpetual temporal space of the periodical. The story thus constructs a fictional (and purely textual) emotional intimacy for readers to consume, actually offering them the affective experience within the *Magazine's* pages. Many of the periodical's readers, working in distant locations across the British Empire, could not possibly have shared continued close associations with school members. Yet these stories served to reinforce a sense of personal and group identity connected to their home institution and the attendant particularities of the British medical woman. Indeed, readers' contributions about their work in the colonies consistently position the native people as 'other'. Subscribers use language which generalises their patients and national colleagues,

in contrast to the individual British female doctor: 'I should like to give a little chat about India and *its people* [my emphasis]' (D.Y. 1900, p. 688); 'I recall an afternoon's outing amongst *them* [Indian people] last week' (Robinson 1899, p. 520); '*Their* complaints were very weird' (Meakin 1903, p. 180). It was often the case that the British female doctor was the only one of her gender and origin in her workplace—'women assistants are an unknown quantity in Australia, and to go out there in that capacity is not at all a pleasant position to be in'—but there is a suggestion that the local people are not viable social companions (Cooper 1904, p. 386).

Similarly, in a short story titled 'Christmas at the Royal Free', written by the Special Correspondent and published in 1903, readers are expected to have personal knowledge of staff and students, and be able to identify them by nicknames. The story is a light-hearted tale set on the wards of the hospital during the festive season, as 'several ardent students' (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 144) decide to run a clinical experiment using the 'Bacillus comicus' (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 143). Inoculating themselves with the bacteria to observe its humorous effects, they report that 'within a few hours the disease was at its height' (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 144). The new patients suffering from 'comedy' take on impressions: "'colleagues" were "skitted" to the life' (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 144). The story's cast and the subjects of these impressions are named after characters in popular works of fiction: Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* (1854). There is Alice, the Mad Hatter and March Hare, and from *The Rose and the Ring*, Countess Gruffanuff, Giglio, Sam, Betsinda, Bulbo, and several more (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 145). Although it is impossible for the modern reader to identify which individuals correspond to which character, the *Magazine's* subscribers enjoyed 'the jokes at each other's expense most uproariously' (Our Special Correspondent 1903, p. 144).

Indeed, 'skitting' is a thread which runs through much of the *Magazine's* content, from readers' reports of their activities at school and abroad, to their sketches and short fiction. The humorous drawing and lampooning of the school's women fostered camaraderie amongst subscribers and reinforced a communal identity through readers' recognition of the figures depicted. The consistency of devices like 'skitting', along with the periodical's regularity of form, helped to substantiate the *Magazine's* social character. This common thread also developed a companionable and warm editorial voice for the periodical. Readers' short stories in particular link this emotional warmth to both the place and people of the LSMW, making personal bonds out of professional allegiances. The *Magazine* expressed friendship through writing in many forms, but readers' fiction articulated a space in which an intimate community was fundamental to the experience of being a medical woman.

## 5. Conclusions

It is clear from both the periodical's content and the voices of contributors that there was a strong editorial and readerly encouragement of the *Magazine's* social character. Although the periodical was a publication associated with a professional institution and aimed at an audience belonging to a specific profession, for the women involved in the *Magazine*, the significance of this association was that it gave them shared experiences around which to form friendships. Unlike other medical periodicals from this period, there was much less emphasis on communicating new knowledge (though, as has been noted, the *Magazine* did contain a limited number of clinical articles intended for intellectual exchange).

The unusualness of such an approach for a professional or even student medical journal suggests that this community-building focus was linked specifically to the unique situation of British female doctors at the turn of the twentieth century. Facing the challenge of integrating into the male-dominated medical profession, and often being met with hostility and obstacles in their career, what was sorely needed was a publication to draw medical women together into a welcoming and united group, particularly as many practising British female doctors did not belong to a physical community of working women or were employed in the colonies, far from the institutions in which they trained.

This develops our knowledge of how periodicals contributed to the formation of medical communities during this period. As women became able to participate in professional publications, they adapted established periodical forms for different purposes. The *Magazine* can be placed in the context of the various specialist periodicals which, appearing throughout the nineteenth century, functioned as a space in which scientific communities were built and organised (Dawson et al. 2020). However, unlike these titles, which created communities through the discussion, dissemination, or practice of science and medicine within their pages, the *Magazine* harnessed serial form to build intimate relationships amongst its readers. These relationships were characterised by personal familiarity and affective bonds: affection, sympathy, humour, and fun were a fundamental part of the communal experience which the periodical provided.

Into the twentieth century, society-run and commercial medical journals increasingly provided female doctors with the chance to flex their intellectual muscles by publishing the findings of their clinical work, and indeed may have been more suited to the purpose of building a professional reputation due to their broader readership which included their male colleagues. Instead, the *Magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women* developed female doctors' sense of shared self through the publication of social content. This fostered a feminised emotional solidarity amongst subscribers, a community of allies in the mission for women's entry into medicine. The usefulness of the periodical form in facilitating sharing and communication between geographically distant individuals enabled this sense of companionship to form on a global scale, making the *Magazine* (and by extension the school) the locus of community for British female doctors working across the Empire.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> The LSMW was connected with the Royal Free Hospital for clinical instruction and the name of its publication changed variously to reflect this over the course of its existence. Here Savile refers to the publication by the title it held in 1901 when she was writing. For simplicity, I refer to the periodical throughout as the *Magazine*.

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