

# Transforming Society Through Science: The Lancet [B1]

Questa pubblicazione, punto di riferimento per la ricerca medica a livello mondiale, compie duecento anni. Ai suoi inizi fu oggetto di polemiche, legate anche all'immagine di veicolo propagandistico del fondatore, il riformista radicale britannico Thomas Wakley.



On 5 October 1823 the first edition of an independent general medical journal appeared on London's [newsstands](#). Its editor was Thomas Wakley, a [surgeon](#) from Devon, who brought on medical colleagues William Lawrence and James Wardrop, journalist William Cobbett, and a [libel](#) lawyer as associates.

## PRIVILEGE AND NEPOTISM

Wakley named the journal The Lancet after the small very [sharp](#) surgical instrument, more commonly known as a 'scalpel'. The weekly publication [aimed](#) to report on London's hospital [lectures](#) and describe the important cases of the day. However, Wakley's specific [aim](#) was to attack incompetence, privilege and nepotism in the British medical establishment.

## MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

The journal dissected medical [lectures](#), exposed malpractices, and even accused the [nephew](#) of the president of the Royal College of Surgeons of incompetence (in his painfully laborious extraction of a [bladder stone](#) through a cut in a patient's scrotum). Because of its high-profile targets, The Lancet often ended up being [sued](#) for [libel](#) in the courts. In a number of cases, a guilty verdict was returned but then damages set at a very low [figure](#). This appeared to prove The Lancet's point: that nepotism existed throughout the British establishment — but that reform was possible. With its reputation intact, The Lancet's popularity [soared](#). In 1935, Wakley became a Member of Parliament, where he was an [outspoken](#) proponent of all kinds of social reform. He kept his seat there until 1852. On his death, in 1862, his family retained editorship of The Lancet until 1908.

## RELEVANT RESEARCH

Under new owners, The Lancet's work continued through the 20th century. It only published research that it saw as relevant to ordinary human lives, and maintained extremely high standards. It published [groundbreaking](#) studies, from [shell shock](#) in World War One soldiers, to diabetes, breast cancer, heart disease, nutritional [labelling](#) and mental healthcare. It conducted campaigns, such as that [to ban](#) tobacco in the UK (2003), and to demand an independent investigation into the US bombing of a hospital in Afghanistan (2015).

## JOURNALS AND PODCAST

Since 1991, The Lancet has been owned by [Dutch](#) academic publisher Elsevier. Its British editor-in-chief is Richard Horton, and it has editorial offices in London, New York City and Beijing. The Lancet Group now [encompasses](#) twenty-four separate journals, each dealing with a specific area of medical research, including [HIV](#), child and adolescent health,

infectious diseases and psychiatry. It also has a [fortnightly](#) podcast, The Lancet Voice.

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# Glossary

- **sharp** = affilato
- **encompasses** = comprendere
- **surgeon** = chirurgo
- **bladder stone** = calcolo alla vescica
- **figure** = cifra
- **to ban** = proibire
- **Dutch** = olandese
- **newsstands** = edicole
- **libel** = diffamazione
- **lectures** = conferenze, lezioni
- **aim** = obiettivo
- **soared** = elevarsi
- **outspoken** = dichiarato, esplicito
- **HIV** = acronimo di "human immunodeficiency virus"
- **nephew** = nipote (di zia/zio)
- **sued** = fare causa, denunciare
- **groundbreaking** = rivoluzionari
- **shell shock** = psicosi per trauma bellico
- **labelling** = etichettatura
- **fortnightly** = quindicinale