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Getting nurses to write: Conducting Writing for Publication workshops

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BACKGROUND

One of the challenges for nurse editors is to encourage nurses to write for publication and, in particular, assist potential authors overcome the barriers to writing for publication. These barriers may include lack of experience, lack of time and fear of rejection (Oermann 2001). However, most often it is lack of confidence in their writing and their subject matter that prevents nurses from writing for publication (Albarran and Scholes 2005). This article will describe the development and success of writing for publication workshops that I have undertaken over the past 3 years. I will describe the pre-work, the workshop process and recommendations from the workshops. The aim of providing this information is to assist nurse editors in encouraging clinicians to write for publication.

PRE - WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

The workshops are organised by nursing organisations (often specialist nurses) who are interested in promoting publication, often in their own specialty. Advertising for sessions is done at least 3 months prior to the workshops and potential registrants are advised that they will be required to undertake pre-workshop preparation. They are emailed or faxed a 2 page pre-workshop worksheet asking them to:

1. Describe their barriers to writing for publication
2. State what they do really well in clinical practice
3. State what really annoys them in clinical practice and how this could be improved
4. Reflect on any recent conference presentations and how they would structure these for publication
5. Choose one of the responses from the previous three questions and write down 5 separate aspects related to the area that they would need to cover in a publication
6. Search, find and print 3 peer reviewed journal articles related to their topic and bring them to the workshop

The attendees are asked to email or fax the completed workshop activity to the workshop facilitator who can use the information to tailor the workshop to the particular needs of the participants. Furthermore, this pre-workshop activity engages the nurses in preparing a topic for publication. Many come to the workshops very well prepared with a draft publication plan.

WORKSHOPS

The workshops can be organised to run between 4 to 8 hours depending on the organizing organization's resources. There are no limits on attendance numbers and this again depends on resources. Nurses can be from one specialty or from various areas. An unexpected finding of nurses coming together at workshops who come from different backgrounds has been the co-authorship that has resulted from the networking at workshops.

Ultimately, the goal at the end of the workshop is for each nurse to have written a completed abstract that they can go away and develop (ideally with mentorship). Although this appears an

unusual way of writing (most authors will write the abstract AFTER they write the paper) it provides the nurses with an understanding of how to write each separate section of a manuscript.

The workshop consists mainly of facilitating the nurses' own ideas which is achieved by small group work (in groups of 3 or 4). Each time the participants separate into small groups they are required to do a task, for example, developing the aim of their paper. They separate into these groups and then return to disseminate their work to the larger group. Given that the workshop is divided into developing the paper's aim (the 'so what'), title, methods, results, clinical implications and conclusions there are many occasions for the nurses to actively engage each other in their own writing areas.

To break up the group sessions the workshop facilitator provides information on each task but also on other areas of publication interest such as:

1. Compilation of the nurses' feedback from their pre-workshop activities
2. Peer review process
3. Author guidelines
4. Impact factors
5. Journal selection

This extra information can be tailored to each group ensuring that the information is appropriate and does not discourage writing for publication, i.e. making writing for publication appear too scary.

Towards the end of the workshop, strategies for writing for publication are further discussed. These include strategies for novice writers such as: planning and selecting a body of time to write; referencing strategies; attracting search engines; embracing reviewer's recommendations; obtaining critical feedback and writing with colleagues.

The workshop is completed with a "where to from here" discussion to ensure each nurse has a strategy to further the abstract into a manuscript for submission.

EVALUATION

Collation of worksheet feedback has provided useful information to address further aspects of publication. In particular, feedback relating barriers to writing for publication have been compiled and include:

1. Lack of writing skills "I tend to write like I speak"
2. Lack of mentorship/support "No direction"
3. Too overwhelming/Fear of the unknown/Potential ridicule
4. Getting the ideas together
5. Peer review rigmarole
6. Stakeholder and colleagues' lack of motivation
7. Inexperience with data analysis, literature search, ethics applications
8. Lack of confidence that they can make a difference
9. Correct referencing
10. Previous (publisher) rejection

This information provided by those who attend the workshops is used by the facilitator to address barriers to writing and consistently stimulates discussion and comment.

Most attendees are senior nurses, clinicians, nurse educators and managers who are novice writers. They are interested in the de-mystifying the unknown of writing for publication. A high proportion of the formal evaluations indicate the attendees' positive feedback of the sessions, with many indicating that they will develop their manuscript and submit for publication.

Although not possible at every session, the facilitator collects and stores the nurses' email addresses (with their permission) and advises them that they will be receiving an email them in 12 months time to check on their progress. Results of the first twelve month evaluation has seen 25% of the attendees of one workshop (n=20) submitting for publication within 12 months following the workshop. This has been promising and has stimulated a pilot study to formally evaluate this information.

SUMMARY

This paper has described some aspects of my experience of presenting over 20 writing for publication workshops to clinicians. These nurse clinicians have been from specialist (e.g., nephrology, transplant, critical care nurses) and generalist backgrounds. I believe that the workshops engage novice nurse writers and assist in de-mystifying the writing for publication process. This may increase the amount of nurse writers with the ultimate aim of disseminating high quality information through more nurses writing for publication.

REFERENCES

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