Promoting Academic Publication
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Publication output is vital for the advancement of nursing science because it provides the forum for discussion and debate, and for the communication of discoveries and new understandings. Publication is at the heart of knowledge generation as each successive generation of scholars adds their own contribution to our understanding of the world. This communication of ideas via publication is an essential component of the development of the profession (Driscoll & Driscoll 2002) because it helps shape current practice, defines the boundaries of the profession, and offers new possibilities for the future. Publication allows nurses to engage with other nurses, other disciplines, and policy makers to influence health care at the local, national, and global levels.

From a different perspective, the number of academic papers published in high quality peer reviewed journals is also a fundamental indicator of individual academic performance and, for university departments of nursing, comprise an external evaluative measure of the quality of disciplinary research in their organization against national and international standards. While the importance of publication is widely recognized and acknowledged within the profession, nurse academics continue to be reluctant authors. This paper presents a novel approach to help support publication by academics.

Publication as a Performance Indicator

Publication impacts directly on academics and universities. Publication rates are one of the most common indicators of an academic’s performance (Emden 1998). From this perspective, the greater the number publications on the résumé, the better the job prospects, promotion opportunities, and research grant success. As a result, the concept of ‘publish or perish’ has become part of the academic landscape (McGrail et al. 2006, Pile 2009). However, like academics, the research performance of universities is also judged in part by publication output. For example, in Australia a national government initiative, Excellence in Research Australia (ERA), assesses research quality across the university sector using a combination of metrics including a publishing frequency indicator to measure the performance of disciplines as being below, at, or above world-class standard. ERA outcomes will inform the funding of research training in universities and new minimum standards for institutions’ research and training to be administered by the government’s regulatory and quality agency for higher education, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (ARC 2012). As a consequence, considerable pressure has been placed on academics to generate and sustain a high level of publications in quality journals.

Barriers to Publication

Despite multiple drivers for generating journal articles, publication by academics and particularly by nurses has remained low (Keen 2007). Studies in the USA and Australia have highlighted the low publication rate of many academics (Emden 1998, Sax et al. 2002), and that there is considerable variation in publication rates between departments of nursing (Green et al. 2002).
Only limited attention has been given to the potential barriers to publication that are encountered by academics. However, barriers to publication can be classified as pre-submission or post-submission factors. Pre-submission barriers are those that are encountered prior to the submission of a manuscript to a journal, whereas post-submission barriers are those encountered during the journal’s peer review process. Themes and examples for both sets of common barriers are described in Table 1.

Table 1.
Commonly perceived barriers to publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-submission barriers</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>Demands of academic role associated with teaching and administration results in time to write and publish being delayed in favor of more immediate duties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of experience</td>
<td>Writing for publication is a demanding process that requires considerable skill as well as something worthwhile to write about. Lack of experience in scholarly academic endeavors/research, selecting a suitable target journal, and fulfilling journal specific manuscript requirements may pose considerable challenges for novice authors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>Submitting work for public review and scrutiny can be an intimidating process that may act as a barrier to both the novice</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Post-submission barriers</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Duration of peer review process</td>
<td>Manuscript submission is generally a slow process. Even for outstanding papers, external drivers for academics to publish in good quality journals have increased review process from submission to the article appearing in print. Sustaining interest and commitment to the manuscript, especially those requiring major changes when the topic may have lost currency in the duration from submission to print, proves challenging for those with other demands competing for their attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harsh reviewer comments</td>
<td>Peer reviewers can be direct and blunt in their critique of a manuscript. This type of commentary can be demotivating for all authors but particularly those submitting their first manuscript. Harsh comments about the quality of the manuscript may deter the author from doing further work and re-submitting the paper.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflicting reviewer comments</td>
<td>Conflicting comments from peer reviewers and/or editors are sometimes encountered. For the inexperienced writer managing the re-submission of the manuscript becomes a more</td>
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</table>
Lack of momentum

For academics who have not developed good writing habits, it can be a difficult starting the process by identifying a topic, creating time for writing and finding the motivation to commence.

Managing rejection

The reasons for a manuscript to be rejected are not always related to the quality of manuscript or the topic selected. Sometimes the paper is just not the right fit for the journal’s readership. Outright rejection, however, can lead authors to question the worthiness of their work and rather than revise the paper and submit to another journal, they abandon any further development.

Literature Supporting Improved Publication Performance

A range of different approaches have been used to promote and support publication by academics. Common approaches to promoting publication have included support groups (Pololi et al. 2004, Page-Adams et al. 1995); coaching (Baldwin & Chandler 2002); writing courses (Gay 1994, Lawrence & Folcik 1996, Sommers et al. 1996); and mentoring (Berger 1990).

A writing for publication course combined with a monthly writing group was used for a group of academics in nursing and other disciplines (Rickard et al. 2009). The course was an intensive 5-day course led by a consultant and consisted of instruction and time devoted to writing. Participants reported increased writing confidence as a result of participation in the course and an increase in the submission of manuscripts to peer reviewed journals (Rickard et al. 2009).

A department of general practice used a dedicated ‘writing week’, which involved attendance at a presentation given by the workshop leader, meetings with the workshop leader, and book token incentives (Temple-Smith et al. 2009). Prior to the workshop participants had to identify potential papers and develop goals for the week. Participants’ evaluation of the writing week was positive, and a number of papers were submitted for publication in the 3 months following the workshop.

A systematic review conducted in Australia by McGrail and colleagues of interventions to increase academic publication rates evaluated the effectiveness of writing courses, writing support groups, and writing coaches (McGrail et al. 2006). The review found that all 3 strategies led to an increase in publications for the study participants. There were no trends to suggest that one approach was more effective that the others (McGrail et al. 2006). There was some suggestion that the interventions also improved manuscript quality. However, increases in publication rates appeared to be relatively modest across the studies.

Intervention Strategy

For one large Australian School of Nursing and Midwifery, the activities tried by others inspired a rethink of how academic staff could be assisted to increase their publication outputs. Although the School had an agreed workload model that apportioned 40% of time to teaching, 40% to research (incorporating publication production time), and 20% to administration, staff frequently cited teaching demands and the lack of a concentrated period outside the interruptions of the campus environment as being key inhibitors to writing academic manuscripts.

In 2011, the School implemented a series of writers retreats. The aim of the retreats was to provide
staff with a concentrated block of time, off campus and away from any distractions associated with their teaching and administration duties, to develop or finalize a manuscript for submission. Academic staff in the School (Level A [Associate Lecturer], Level B [Lecturer/Research Fellow], and Level C [Senior Lecturer]) were invited to apply to attend the retreat if they had a manuscript already in draft or a completed project ready for write-up. The retreats were led by one or two members of the School’s professoriate (Level D [Associate Professor], Level E [Professor]) whose role was to act as coach/critical friend for participants. A Research Assistant (RA) was also allocated for each retreat to assist participants to undertake literature searches and coordinate logistics (e.g., arranging IT support, printing, and physical resources) in preparation for the retreat.

Once participants had been identified, they were required to work with the designated professoriate member and the RA to prepare for the retreat. This included attendance at a series of one-on-one meetings where participants discussed their manuscript, expectations of the retreat, the editorial style and readership of the journal to which they planned to submit the article, and authorship. Participants were requested to adhere to a set of "rules of engagement" for the retreat, which included not reading or responding to emails and that they would come together as a group once per day (usually at lunch or dinner) to debrief, discuss their writing, and where needed, motivate each other to achieve their agreed outputs from the retreat.

Three writers retreats were held off campus during 2011, with between 5 and 6 academic lecturers, designated member(s) of the professoriate, and the RA. The retreats were four to five days in duration and were held in a resort motel located outside a small coastal town approximately two hours drive from the university. A mini bus was hired to transport participants and each had their own room, and all meals, travel and accommodation costs were covered by the School. All participants had a personal laptop computer, and printing and internet access was available.

While the overall effectiveness of this strategy is still in the evaluative phase, early indications suggest that it has proved beneficial. The publication submission rate per academic staff member in 2011 increased from previous year's performance, and the rate of acceptance in higher quality journals also improved. The expected number of staff to obtain supported researcher status for 2011 (a university research-based award) is expected to increase, and weighted publication points are expected to rise over previous years.

There have also been unforeseen benefits from this intervention strategy. Debriefing sessions during the retreat allowed participants to discuss personal inhibitors and enablers to publication preparation, identify future projects they could work on together, and offer each other ongoing support post retreat. Feedback from participants also suggested that having "time out" from the pressures of normal academic duties improved morale, provided opportunities for team building, and increased collegiality in the School.

Further writers retreats have been arranged for 2012, including one led by an internationally renowned visiting nurse research scholar. While the financial outlay of supporting an off campus writers retreat may be prohibitive for smaller departments and schools of nursing and midwifery, the benefits of providing interventional strategies to improve academic publications rates cannot be underestimated. In universities, increasing external pressures on disciplines for independent ranking of research performance that includes publication outputs necessitates creative opportunities for nurse academics to write and share knowledge, understandings, and evidence through the production of high quality scientific papers.

Conclusion
While publication is a critical component of the role of the academic and vital for the development of the profession, nurses have been reluctant to publish. This paper presented a novel intervention strategy aimed at stimulating the production of academic papers in one Australian School of Nursing and Midwifery. Initial indications are that the approach adopted has had a positive impact on publication rates and quality of papers produced, as well as providing team building opportunities and strengthening collegiality among academic staff.

References
Gay J T (1994) Teaching graduate students to write for publication. Journal of Nursing Education 33, 328-329.

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