

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Getting Others to Write: Not for the Faint of Heart

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Writing for publication in scholarly journals and other popular forums including blogs, op-eds, and letters to the editor is one way professional nurses raise their voices to influence patient care and its outcomes. But writing is hard; for many nurses, writing for publication is fraught with obstacles and challenges. Whether conducting research, developing evidence-based projects that seek to improve care, or engaging in patient advocacy and policy making (regulation or legislation), the nurse who writes must master many tasks, from putting that first idea on paper to navigating the submission process—a daunting and even overwhelming prospect for any novice writer.

Everyone has the capacity to learn how to write well, although the process of drafting and revising is not for the faint of heart. Novice writers must be encouraged, empowered, and supported if they are going to write for publication. In fact, Murray (2009) suggests that experienced writers can act as coaches, encouragers, and creators of “safe and supportive” environments in the writing process. Experienced nurse authors, editors, and reviewers have an obligation to offer advice on writing and nurture future writers.

To encourage professional nurses and nursing students to discover their voices, so that they can learn to write and convey their clinical insights to broader audiences, the Center for Health, Media & Policy at Hunter College and the Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing have created a course titled Narrative Writing for Health Care Professionals. Two of the Center’s Senior Fellows, Jim Stubenrauch and Joy Jacobson, who both have articles in this issue of *Nurse Author & Editor*, help professional nurses and nursing students to become more effective writers and, as a result, better communicators, advocates, patient navigators, members of interprofessional health care teams—in sum, more compassionate providers of patient-centered care.

Through narrative and reflective writing, nurses become writers and writers become nurses. Here nurses have an opportunity to share stories about their everyday work. In writing reflective narratives, nurses have an opportunity to share stories about their everyday work in a way that makes it understandable to a broader audience. These stories take courage to write and to share with others. The writing process can reveal how nursing care and acts of patient advocacy often go unnoticed and unrecognized. Through writing—for themselves, at first, and then for publication—nurses and their readers come to recognize how very vital is the work nurses really do.

I know, as an author, editor, and educator, the importance of communicating about nursing to the greater world through my words, whether spoken or printed. I know that when my words are translated through good writing, they have the power to transform lives and change the world. When nurses read my editorials and they respond by writing “A Letter to the Editor,” I know I have transformed a life. Nurses must not be silent and must articulate clearly the injustices caused by lack of access to care and the inequities, inefficiencies, and brokenness of our health care delivery system. By telling our truths and encouraging each other to promote social and economic justice, we

can change the world together.

The exciting thing about learning to communicate one's ideas clearly, concisely, and effectively in writing is that it can be applied to all aspects of nursing, no matter the type of writing—narratives, blogs, scholarly articles, even dissertations. So the next time you as an author, editor, or reviewer cross paths with a reluctant writer, remind him or her that reflective reading and writing have been shown to enhance interpersonal skills, increase job satisfaction and retention, and promote empathy among health care professionals. For example, recent studies show that reading literary works as a main component of reflective writing support these kinds of outcomes

(<http://njch.org/programs/program-literature-medicine/>). Getting others to write, to tell their stories and disseminate their research and scholarship, helps all nurses to better understand and articulate the importance of their work. Nurses must demonstrate how they make a difference to the bottom line and to patient outcomes to all who will listen: elected officials, boards of trustees, hospital administrators, and consumers. Now, that is truly not for the faint of heart.

### References

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