

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Promoting a Writing Culture in Nursing

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#### Introduction

The movement of nursing education from the UK (United Kingdom) health service into the Higher Education sector (HE) in the late 1990s has presented challenges, in particular an increased emphasis on research and writing for publication, an endeavour not generally expected (or, in some cases encouraged) by the former Colleges of Nursing (Cooke and Green 2000). At the time of migration into the university sector, it was noted that the need to improve research capacity was one of the main issues facing nursing educators as they moved from a predominately teaching focussed environment to one that involved the development of a research profile. In general, nursing academics are inclined to spend less time engaged in academic writing (book chapters) and research (journal papers) than academics from other disciplines. Reasons given for non-engagement range from the perceived need to maintain a clinical presence to the demand of the extended curriculum, a large student population and associated academic/administrative duties (Traynor and Rafferty 1998; Jutel 2007). There is also the issue of the motivation to publish. Jutel (2007) found that although the most common reason given for not publishing was lack of time; this was closely followed by a lack of publishing knowhow and motivation to write.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the background to and development of 'CARE', an online health based journal sponsored by a Scottish University. The journal aims to encourage and nurture new writers and researchers at all stages of their academic/clinical careers.

#### What it means to be an academic in nursing

Becoming a nursing academic involves a socialisation process that leads the individual on a journey, often moving from a pre-dominantly practice based organisation into the University sector (Andrew et al 2007). The need to create a meaningful learning culture for nursing academics is becoming a priority as research output is now both a financial and intellectual imperative (Jutel 2007). Publication is one of the main benchmarks for judging scholarly worth and nursing, as part of the wider academy, now has to compete for recognition in the same arena as all other academic disciplines. Rolfe and Gardiner (2006) argue strongly that because in the UK, research input and output is tied to grant award, we are in danger of losing those less tangible facets of the research process such as craft, skill and passion. Boud and Lee (1999) highlight major problems with this restrictive definition of research. They believe that academics may not consider research/writing to be 'normal business within the daily life of the work place' (p10). The process is lengthy, commencing with a complex funding application (many of which are unsuccessful) and ending with the need for publication in 'alpha' journals, incorporating numerous hurdles and stages in between. Historically UK nursing has not prioritised research training or the attainment of higher degrees. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (from 2012 the Research Excellence Framework: <http://www.rae.ac.uk/>) which rates research produced by UK universities, now affects nursing in the same way as any other discipline. The outcomes of the RAEs in 1992, 1996 and 2001 placed

nursing at the bottom of the ranking overall (Cecil et al., 2006). Although it not entirely evident as to why the rating remains low, it is argued that it may partly be due to a tendency to engage in short term, small scale projects, rather than longer term, collaborative, programmatic approaches. Rolfe (2006) argues that as nursing is an essentially practice based discipline it is difficult to apply traditional academic standards and criteria. Nurses are now, however, beginning to discover 'what it means to be an academic' (Lee and Boud 2003 p187). To underpin and continue to develop professional competence and promote innovative practice, the discipline must engage in the process of peer review and dissemination in both national and international arenas. If robust findings remain unpublished they are lost both to nursing and the wider academic community (McVeigh et al 2002).

Nursing academics, working in departments founded in the UK in the 1960s and 70s in 'old', research strong universities, are more likely to behave as traditional academics, placing an emphasis on research activity that certainly equals, if not exceeds, the emphasis on teaching (Cooke and Green 2000). In this respect, in nursing, the 'new' universities have failed to equal the research output of the more traditional institutions. The main barriers to publication cited in the literature are lack of skill, time, motivation and research culture (Traynor and Rafferty 1998; Cooke and Green 2006; Jutel 2007). Jutel surveyed 171 academic staff (77 responded) in a 'new' institution and discovered that although time to write was seen as an issue, a significant percentage of respondents (20%) did not know how to get started and that overall the majority (55%) felt that initial help through peer review and comment would enable and support the writing/publishing process.

### **Support for writing and publication**

The size and diversity of student cohorts, in some disciplinary areas has led to academic practice development being focussed largely in the area of teaching and learning and 'by and large this remains the case today' (Lee and Boud 2003 p 187). Nursing is one such discipline with many undergraduate programmes in the UK recruiting hundreds of students on an annual basis. The overt support needs of such large student populations inevitably dominate the academic agenda and often the inclusion of a post-semester teaching period, required to meet the minimum number of theory/practice hours ([www.nmc.uk.org](http://www.nmc.uk.org)), further impacts on research and publication (Andrew et al., 2007a, 2007b; Andrew et al., in press). Although this situation remains a dominant reality in undergraduate nursing, the need for academic development in the area of research is now deemed a necessity (Andrew and Ferguson 2008). To enable the growth and development of 'new academic identities' within the former non-university sector and the new professional areas, the culture of research has to become as apparent as that of the culture of teaching (Lee and Boud 2003 p 187). Boud and Lee (1999) however comment that without a commitment to intellectual investment this may prove an unlikely reality. Although personal commitment invariably involves a degree of self-sacrifice, the investment often seeds the growth of 'personal satisfaction and pleasure' that, in the longer term, motivates and sustains engagement with the process of research and writing (p10).

The benefits of a supportive system of peer and editorial review are cited in the literature to support the development of the practice of academic work (Lee and Boud 2003). In 2007, a group of academics from the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health at Glasgow Caledonian University formed a publication group to support academics who were motivated to write but for a variety reasons remained at the level of unpublished or novice authors. From this initial working group CARE (<http://www.healthquest.org/care>), an online journal has emerged, providing a peer reviewed gateway, not only for novice writers from academia, but also postgraduate students and healthcare clinicians from Nursing, Midwifery and the Allied Health Professions (Andrew 2008). The journal is operationally managed and edited by working academics all of whom are passionate about

supporting and promoting the work of novice writers. The aim of an interdisciplinary approach is to foster relationships among health professionals to promote a publication ethos within these groups. The journal exists to promote this ideal, encouraging the dissemination of innovative research across the boundaries of the health disciplines (Andrew 2008). Three editions of the journal have now been published, with many of the authors publishing for the first time. Papers have been received from the disciplines of Primary and Secondary care nursing, from the UK and beyond with growing numbers of contributions from the Allied Health Professions.

### **Conclusion**

The need to increase the production of high quality academic writing and research remains a challenge. The reality of managing large undergraduate nursing programmes, encompassing increasingly diverse populations, means that there will continue to be a tension between the cultures of writing/research and teaching. Traditionally nursing has not promoted or prioritised research although those departments housed in 'old' universities appear to more readily adopt a traditional academic profile. Perhaps, inevitably, the process of normalising research, writing and publication in nursing will rely heavily on personal time and commitment. Competing for funding may also restrict the appeal of research as nursing departments, in an attempt to elevate their RAE/REF rating move away from small practice-based studies to embrace wider collaborative programmatic approaches.

There is little doubt that, if we are to raise the status of the profession and compete on an equal footing with other academic disciplines, we have to prioritise research involvement; that is now a large part of what it means to be an nursing academic. The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Community Health, at Glasgow Caledonian University sponsor an online journal with a specific mission. CARE exists to promote the work of novice writers/researcher from Nursing and the Allied Health Professions. The journal aims to encourage the professions to share work with others, across the boundaries of the health disciplines, enriching our common knowledge base and advancing the standing of health-related teaching within Higher Education.

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