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Writing for Wikipedia

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“Wikipedia?” I hear you ask. Perhaps you think Wikipedia is full of false information that anyone can edit and add to at will, without checks and balances. If you do, then I urge you to think again. A *Nature* Special Report¹ compared the scientific information in Wikipedia and *Encyclopedia Britannica* very favorably and others have called for greater input into Wikipedia by experts.² You may also wonder as an author and an editor how writing in Wikipedia can benefit you and the community we serve.



WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

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WHAT IS WIKIPEDIA?

Wikipedia is an online encyclopaedia—the largest in the world—and the term “wiki” means that it is a shared endeavour to which many people can contribute. According to [Wikipedia](#) (accessed 24 May 2020): “Wikipedia is a multilingual online encyclopaedia created and maintained as an open collaboration project by a community of volunteer editors, using a wiki-based editing system.” Wikipedia is a Wikimedia project and it is “crowd-funded” by many small donations from readers. While some are critical of the funding model,^{3,4} it has no other sources of funding and there are other spin-off projects of Wikimedia such as [Wikiversity](#) and the Wikijournals, for example, the [WikiJournal of Medicine](#). It is worth noting that there is a [Wikipedia: Cochrane Collaboration](#). From the user perspective Wikipedia is free to access and information can be shared freely under an appropriate [Creative Commons Licence](#).

BENEFITS

There are many benefits to writing for Wikipedia personally and as a service to our professional community. Wikipedia entries cover a wide variety of subjects and these include people, places, organisations, diseases, research methods, and professions. This list is far from exhaustive but, already, you should see that there are potentially many places you can contribute. By adding to existing sites and creating others you can highlight important people and topics in nursing and, provided that you appropriately declare it, you can add your own works to Wikipedia pages where it is relevant. Specifically, if one of your publications is included in a Wikipedia entry then this gains an Altmetric® score^{5,6} of 3 compared with a mention on Twitter® which only gains a score of 1.

It is often lamented that important figures in nursing—historical and contemporary—are not sufficiently represented in Wikipedia. It is also known that women and

people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are underrepresented on Wikipedia. It is pointless being aware of this and complaining about it when the answer is in your hands; you can edit and create Wikipedia entries so you can easily become part of the solution.

Nevertheless, Wikipedia does have standards related to what is considered a suitable entry. The most important thing is that you can support what you are writing by a range of independent (preferably online) sources. With reference to pages about people the issue of “notability” is important. According to [Wikipedia](#) (accessed 28 May 2020; *emphasis in original*): “People are presumed **notable** if they have received significant coverage in **multiple published secondary sources** that are **reliable, intellectually independent** of each other, and **independent of the subject**.”

Therefore, if you do intend to add an article on someone to Wikipedia you have to consider these points. New articles are scrutinized by an editor, known as a “Wikipedian” and if the subject of an article is not sufficiently notable then the page will be flagged for improvements or, in some cases, taken down. While you may liaise with the subject of a Wikipedia page you should be aware of potential conflicts of interest and these could include working in the same institution or being a close associate of the person such as a regular co-author. Conflicts of interest can be declared but they are best avoided and will be noted by an editor and sometimes flagged on the article. One particularly problematic aspect of an article about a person is the use of an image of the subject. If you happen to have taken a photograph of the person yourself and can claim the copyright of that image, then this is the easiest way of adding an image. If you are given an image and, especially, if it has previously appeared anywhere on the Internet, then you must obtain permission to use it and independent proof of that permission must be provided to [Wikipedia Permissions](#) (accessed 12 June 2020) if requested.

Otherwise, the image will be taken down. Please note that you should never attempt to create a Wikipedia page about yourself. If you are lucky enough to you're your own Wikipedia page then you must not edit it yourself.

Most major nursing organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom, the American Academy of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau and the International Council of Nursing have Wikipedia pages. Likewise, the major nursing journals such as the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *World Views on Evidence Based Nursing* and *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* have pages. These pages vary in their completeness and the extent to which they are up to date. Provided you have a reliable source to reference, then you are free to update these. If you are associated with an organization or journal, then you need to be aware of conflicts of interest. A Wikipedia page is supposed to be a factual and independent account of the subject and not a commercial advertisement.

Another opportunity of contributing to Wikipedia is through topic pages. These can be about clinical topics and aspects of research methodology. Where you have the necessary expertise and independent sources to support your edits and additions you should see this as an opportunity to offer improvements to specific pages. You should have a limited range of pages which you can keep an eye on, edit, and see the changes made by others. Clearly these types of pages offer the opportunity to add new references to published work and to add your own work. However, your approach should be balanced, and you should be willing to refer to other sources and to make it clear—as a conflict of interest—that you have made reference to your own work.

HOW DO I WRITE AND EDIT WIKIPEDIA?

Anyone can write for and edit Wikipedia. When you read a Wikipedia article you will note that there are permanent hypertexts inviting edits. You do not even need to have a Wikipedia account. However, I would advise anyone thinking of editing Wikipedia to set up an account whereby you can generate your own username and password. In this way your contributions to Wikipedia can be tracked and attributed to you. You will also have your own user page where you can record your activities and tell other users about yourself. Also, Wikipedians can correspond with you, often to tell you about something you should not have done, especially when you begin working on Wikipedia. Sometimes, they will revert changes you have made if they consider that they do not meet the appropriate standard. This is all part of the Wikipedia learning process. It is possible to make changes anonymously without logging in, but your IP address becomes visible to all readers. If you persist in making errors or try to edit to a lower standard, for example, by inserting inaccurate or unsupported points, then your IP address will be blocked for a period. Likewise, your Wikipedia account can be blocked.

It must be said that editing Wikipedia pages is not easy. When you go to edit you will be given the choice of a visual editor, or you may use the HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). The visual editor is good for editing pieces of text and it looks like editing a Word document. While there are other tools to help you edit specific features such as inserting references, it is almost always necessary to at some point in the process to use the HTML. This requires some mastery. My advice is not to try to learn every aspect of this; rather you can look for features you commonly need to insert, such as references and websites, on Wikipedia pages, go to edit, and copy the HTML used there. You can keep a store of useful pieces of HTML in a Word document for regular use. If you make a mistake and are concerned that you may not be able to correct it, simply cancel the editing process without publishing the page and it will revert to the original. Each time you make a change, prior to publishing it, you will be asked to describe the change and

whether it is minor or that others need to watch that page. You can bypass this step, but that is less useful to others who may make subsequent edits.

CONCLUSION

I would like to see more nurses involved with Wikipedia, and more nurses and aspects of nursing represented there. If you only use Wikipedia occasionally or have avoided—but would like to contribute—then look at some pages of interest to you and see if you can improve these. If there are obvious gaps in the Wikipedia, then see if you can fill them.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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