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Challenges and opportunities nurses experienced to turn conference presentations into journal articles

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nurses need to build their professional knowledge base through the publication of research findings in scientific journals. Substantial preparation goes into the preparation of a conference presentation, which could form the basis of a subsequent publication.

Methods: A descriptive single case study design with multiple data types was used to describe the extent to which nurses from Southern Africa convert their conference presentation into journal articles; and to describe the prohibiting or supporting issues they experience in converting their conference presentations into journal articles.

Setting and participants: Nurses in low and middle-income countries form the backbone of health services in for example the Southern African region. Many of those nurses present papers at annual regional nursing conferences.

Data collection: Administrative staff from three reputable nursing organisations sent recruitment and information letters to the members on the databases, requesting them to complete a short questionnaire via SurveyMonkey™. The questionnaire comprised closed and open-ended questions. The software of SurveyMonkey™ automatically performed descriptive analyses of the closed-ended questions. The researchers analysed the narrative data obtained via the open-ended questions through open inductive coding.

Results: The majority of nurses (78,3%) who attended and/or presented papers at an international conference had at least a master's degree and are therefore no strangers to research. However, only 46 individuals reported 70 publications that derived from conference presentations over the last 5 years. Positive feedback from reviewers and receiving incentives were identified, among others, as motivators while common inhibitors were the complexity related to the writing, submitting and reviewing processes as well as the lack of dedicated time.

Conclusions: Contextual factors such as offering parallel programmes, supplementing an insufficient income with consultation work, lack of time and incentives, and lack of mentors to guide novices through the complex process of writing and submitting articles may be more pronounced in low and middle-income countries than in developed countries. A comparison between the north-south rate of converting conference presentations into journal articles may provide further light on this topic.

1. Introduction and background

The nursing profession needs nurses who are prepared for master's and doctoral studies (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010) to build the knowledge base for nursing scholarship. However, Thoun (2009) is of the opinion that scholarship is not only demonstrated through published articles, but also through attending and participating in scientific and professional meetings, writing research proposals for funding, curriculum development based on reflective practice resulting in publication in refereed journals, evaluation of educational technologies,

leadership in teaching and administrative practice related to education oriented or health oriented institutions, evaluating papers and grant applications, theory based practice documented through published reports, documentation of knowledge transfer to practice settings, and leadership in practice resulting in development of practice procedures, change in policies and advocacy for nursing practice. Although Stockhausen and Turale (2011) as well as Turale et al. (2010) voiced their concern that publishing in high-impact journals is the only evidence of scholarly activity, the fact remains that research results that are not disseminated cannot contribute to the much-needed body of

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knowledge in the profession.

Annually a three-day nursing conference is held where nurses from Southern Africa present research papers of high quality that were peer-reviewed by established research committees. According to the 27th International Nursing Research Congress 2016 programme book, 700 delegates attended the conference during which 199 posters and 224 oral papers were presented. The number of attendees is proof that institutions and individuals invest money into attending and presenting at conferences, possibly with the expectation that the research outputs generated will contribute positively to subsidy.

Within the South African context, the subsidy regimen allows higher education institutions to receive government subsidy, but only research published in peer-reviewed, accredited journals that appear on the DHET, IBSS, ISI, Scopus, Norwegian and ScieLOSA lists generate subsidy.

The number of oral papers and posters presented during the 2016 conference is evidence that high quality research is being done in Southern Africa, but it will not contribute to the body of knowledge if it is not published. In a study conducted by Botma and Roets (2013), 86% of the participants who attended such a conference in 2011 had completed their master's degree in nursing; a lesser number of these having obtained a PhD, but only 37% of the 86% had ever published an article. Although Thoun (2009) mentions various ways of demonstrating scholarship as indicated above, most of the products still need to be in the public domain for peer review and comment to be acknowledged as research outputs.

The assumption underpinning this research is that most of the preparatory work for an article is being done while preparing for an oral or poster presentation at a conference. Daruwalla, Huq, Wong, Nee, and Murphy (2015) support this assumption by stating that a conference presentation should form the basis of a subsequent publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Gibbs (2016) is also of the opinion that the bulk of the reading for an article had been done in preparation for a conference paper. The question that arises is: Why do nurses with master's and doctoral degrees present papers at international conferences, but do not disseminate the results in scientific journals as research output?

2. Aim and research design

A descriptive single case study design with multiple data types was used to explore the (a) extent to which conference presentations are converted into journal articles; and (b) the supporting or prohibiting issues nurses experience in their efforts of converting the conference presentations into articles. The context of this case study is the Southern African region that comprises low and middle-income countries. All these countries have a decentralised primary healthcare service delivery model, with nurses often the only healthcare professionals at these decentralised sites. Despite a severe shortage of nurses, they remain the core of the health services in all the countries in this region. Therefore, dissemination and translation of their research results into practice could contribute to meeting the region's healthcare needs. A pragmatic approach underpins this case study.

3. Data collection method

The researchers compiled a questionnaire that consisted of closed-ended as well as open-ended questions. A thorough literature overview of factors that promote or hinder scholarship development and the publication of results enhanced the face and content validity of the questionnaire. Experts responsible for scholarship development at two universities agreed that the questionnaire provided the information required to answer the research question.

4. Population and sampling

The population consisted of all members of the Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) Africa Consortium, all nurse educators affiliated with higher education institutions, as published in the booklet compiled by the Forum of University Nursing Deans in South Africa (FUNDISA), as well as all members of the Nursing Education Association (NEA) in South Africa. Nurse educators in Southern Africa may belong to all three prestigious organisations. The accessible population size was 820. Census sampling allowed the entire accessible population to participate in the survey.

5. Pilot study

Colleagues at the two institutions with which the authors are associated, volunteered to complete the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey™ and were asked to indicate if there were any ambiguous questions. The researchers corrected grammatical errors of two questions as per their recommendation. The data from the pilot study were not included in the final data set.

6. Data collection

After the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Health Studies at the University of South Africa had provided ethics approval (HSHDC/313/2014), the researchers asked permission of the boards of STTI Africa Consortium, FUNDISA and NEA to distribute the recruitment letter to their members. Through the boards, the secretaries of the respective organisations sent the electronic recruitment letter to 820 members. The recruitment letter explained the purpose of the research and requested recipients to voluntarily participate via a SurveyMonkey™ questionnaire. It was clearly stated that respondents consented to participate in the research by completing and submitting the questionnaire online.

Only 57 questionnaire responses were received from SurveyMonkey™ after the gatekeepers had sent out the first recruitment letter. Despite a reminder sent by the gatekeeper on our request, no new questionnaires were received. Due to the poor response, hard copies of the recruitment letter and questionnaire were distributed at the annual regional conference of STTI in 2016. Only a few additional responses were received. As a last resort to increase the number of responses, a research assistant electronically sent the recruitment letter to all members of FUNDISA as their contact details were in the open domain. An additional 63 responses were received.

Of the 820 e-mail requests for participation sent out, only 120 questionnaires were received back for analysis. Due to possible changes in e-mail addresses and membership, it is not possible to express a reliable response rate for this in a percentage.

7. Data analysis

SurveyMonkey™ software automatically performs descriptive analysis of categorical data generated by closed-ended questions. All narrative data generated through open-ended questions were extracted from SurveyMonkey™ as well as from the hard copy questionnaires and inductively analysed by means of open coding according to the eight steps as described by Tesch. The researchers scrutinised the data repeatedly until themes emerged. They independently coded phrases and clustered them to form categories. The researchers reached consensus on the themes and categories through discussion.

Trustworthiness of narrative data from the open-ended questions was enhanced by having a data trial and using a co-coder that confirmed the truth value of the study. Furthermore, direct quotations from the respondents enhance the truth value of the data. The research is relevant because Africa has a very high burden of disease and it is believed that research from Africa itself should offer solutions to the

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