

PUBLISH OR PERISH: ENSURING LONGEVITY IN NURSE EDUCATION—EVALUATION OF A STRATEGY TO ENGAGE ACADEMICS, STUDENTS, AND CLINICIANS IN PUBLICATION ACTIVITY

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The expectation that academics publish and disseminate research findings, information, and knowledge is increasingly becoming a component of nursing and academic practice. This can be seen as an overwhelming responsibility in the absence of a supportive framework and arbitrary expectations to “publish or perish” within academic and professional life. The pressure to publish has been associated with detrimental effects on creativity, morale, and output. An initiative by a school of nursing to develop a supportive framework to assist staff and multidisciplinary colleagues to publish, by promoting a cultural change through focusing on the benefits of publishing, was successful in increasing confidence, knowledge, and motivation to publish. Through the implementation of a strategic plan acknowledging 4 incremental stages, “promote, prepare, polish and proliferate,” the enormity of the task of publishing was demystified, the skills required were outlined, and the incentive of incorporating these strategies into practice were highlighted. (Index words: Publication; Nursing; Scholarship; Professional development; Writing) *J Prof Nurs* 29:210–216, 2013. © 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE EXPECTATION THAT academics publish and disseminate research findings, information, and knowledge is increasingly becoming a component of nursing and academic practice. This can be seen as an overwhelming responsibility in the absence of a supportive framework and arbitrary expectations to “publish or perish” within academic and professional life. In Australia, universities receive funding based on academic publication rates, and the likelihood of promotion is increased by publication output (McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). The pressure to publish is identified in the literature across disciplines and has been associated with

detrimental effects on creativity, morale, and output (De Rond & Miller, 2005). In addition, without dissemination, there is a risk that the professional body of knowledge does not evolve sequentially with the research and enquiry undertaken (Clapham, 2005).

This article describes an initiative by a school of nursing to develop a supportive framework to assist academics, nurse–clinicians, and multidisciplinary colleagues to publish by promoting a cultural change through focusing on the benefits of publishing. Through the implementation of a strategic plan acknowledging four incremental stages, “promote, prepare, polish and

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proliferate”, the enormity of the task of publishing was demystified, the skills required were outlined, and the incentive of incorporating these strategies into practice were highlighted.

Background

In nursing, written communication is an integral part of professional conduct; however, this does not always convert to publication output (Taylor, Lyon, & Harris, 2005). The increasing expectation to publish may create barriers and anxiety affecting productivity rather than promoting publishing as an opportunity to discuss and disseminate nursing knowledge. As a result, clinical research and new knowledge are often lost to the wider nursing and other health disciplines (Taylor et al., 2005). Consequently, clinicians and nurse academics need to develop skills and knowledge on how to contribute to nursing and professional literature. Unfortunately, clinicians and nurse academics often feel unprepared and underqualified to contribute to the nursing and health literature (Driscoll & Aquilina, 2011). As such, writing for publication is frequently not considered part of their everyday work but additional workload (Happell, 2008). Despite this, the requirement to publish remains an integral and unavoidable part of nursing scholarship and can be viewed as encompassing educational, political, and professional concepts (Taylor et al., 2005).

Educational

As an education tool, publications are instrumental in promoting the dissemination of information, which adds to the body of nursing knowledge (Driscoll & Aquilina, 2011; Driscoll & Driscoll, 2002). The secondary effects, from an educational perspective, are that nursing literature provides a foundation for teaching and promoting validated evidence-based practice. The development of writing skills within academe has been demonstrated not only to benefit staff but also the students they teach (Keen, 2007). Clear, well-articulated writing leads to good communication and improved understanding in all facets of writing, including essays and research reports. In today's information-rich world, it is vital to communicate clearly, concisely, and effectively.

Political

Publications are considered direct measures of individual and institutional performance and credibility (Rickard et al., 2009). Higher education institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate academic performance through evaluation of research quality.

In Australia, research excellence in universities is measured using the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) process, an initiative by the federal government (Australian Research Council, 2011). The process uses a combination of measures on researchers, research outputs, research income, reputation, and other measures, one of which is publication output, to assess research quality. Universities receive extra funding based on their publication rates, and this influences accessibility to

funding, resource opportunities, and consequently translates to competitiveness in the marketplace, as reflected by the coalition of leading universities (Group of Eight [Go8] Australia, 2011). The Go8 is a coalition of the eight leading Australian universities, which are intensive in research and education. Enhancing and extending the contribution of the Go8 members to Australia's social, economic, cultural, and environmental knowledge base is a fundamental aim of the group, and quality publications are avenues in which to ensure this aim.

Professional

Publication output as a professional obligation is not mandated by regulatory and professional nursing bodies in Australia. However, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council standards for both registered nurses and nurse practitioners identify the need for critical thinking and analysis (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2006a, 2006b). This extends to an expectation for contribution to research and practice innovation, including the construct of nursing knowledge through publication. Consequently, job and person specifications for nurse practitioners, advanced practice nurses, and leadership roles often require productivity in this area.

In academe, there is a clearly defined expectation of publication, which is directly associated with tenure and promotion. Without a good publication record, nurse academics may find it difficult to be promoted (McGrail et al., 2006). Because of the traditional focus on provision of clinically relevant and focused nurse education, many employees of schools of nursing may not have undertaken a traditional academic pathway and learned the art of writing to publish.

Promoting Publication Output

Barriers to publishing have been identified as follows: inadequate time, lack of resources, and lack of confidence (De Rond & Miller, 2005; Driscoll & Aquilina, 2011; Keen, 2007; Rickard et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2005). Increasingly, strategies for overcoming these issues are being identified and tested. A search of the literature identified multiple programs for promoting publication output, including step-by-step guides (Happell, 2008) and formal training programs that involved multiple sessions over extended time frames with formal curriculum (Rickard et al., 2009), to the development of writing support groups and mentorship relationships (Taylor et al., 2005). The framework, for the reported strategic plan, was adapted from the work of Rickard et al. and included strategies utilized by Morss and Murray (2001) to promote confidence and focus on writing through incremental writing.

Rickard et al. (2009) developed a “writing for publication course” aimed specifically at increasing exposure and productivity within a small group of academic staff. This initiative incorporated a 1-week course and subsequent monthly writers' support group of 4-hour duration. The implementation of this intensive

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