

Leading article/Uvodnik

## Writing for publication: avoiding the common pitfalls

Pisanje za objavo: kako se izogniti najpogostejšim pastem

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In an age when every aspect of nursing practice should be informed by the best available evidence, it has become even more important that nurses undertaking research share their research findings with practitioners (Timmins, 2015). This dissemination can be achieved in many ways, including conference presentations and, in more recent years, the use of social media. Despite recent technological advances, journals remain one of the most effective ways to share research findings with those who might use the new evidence to guide their professional nursing practice. Journals have the added advantage that they create an archive of research and evidence. Technology has made it much easier to access journal content and with the current drive towards open access publishing it should soon be possible to access all published research.

Whilst it is important to publish research, it is even more important to ensure that only good quality research is published. Poor research, with nothing to contribute to the professional practice of nursing, risks creating a poor evidence base and, more importantly, could have a detrimental impact on patient care. The main way that journals ensure the quality of the research appearing within their pages is through the process of peer review (Shattell, et al., 2010). Whilst there might be some problems with peer review, it remains the best way to review papers submitted and to make decisions about what should be published and what should not.

The editors of most journals will invite at least two peers to undertake reviews of the papers submitted to their journal. In most cases, these reviews are blinded to help ensure greater objectivity and neutrality in the review process. As they receive the reviews, the editor will make a decision about whether a) to publish the paper, b) to invite the authors to undertake revisions or c) to reject the paper. Authors will clearly be hoping to avoid the rejection outcome, but rejection is

something that all authors have to accept as part of the process of seeking publication. Even the most eminent and experienced authors will sometimes have papers rejected by journals.

In this editor's experience, there are at least eight reasons why editors choose not to accept papers for publication. If authors were to reflect on these factors when preparing and submitting papers to journals, there would be fewer rejection outcomes for authors and editors and peer reviewers would spend less time reading papers that will not progress to publication.

### 1. Lack of adherence to author guidelines.

*"Thank you for submitting your paper for consideration, but unfortunately, your paper has not been submitted in a style that can be considered for publication. Please refer to our author guidelines."*

Above is a phrase sometimes used when preparing a response to an author. All journals publish author guidelines that are intended to help authors ensure that papers meet the journal's basic requirements and these guidelines are normally available on journal websites. On far too many occasions authors fail to adhere to the guidelines or to meet the journal's requirements. For example, journals will have word limits but authors will often exceed limits, sometimes by thousands of words. When this happens, editors are left with little option but to reject papers even before they are sent for peer review.

### 2. Mismatch with the journal's scope.

*"This is an interesting paper, but the content is not within the remit of this journal."*

There are many journals available to those wishing to publish their research, so it is essential that authors

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select the right journal for their research. Regardless of the quality of the research, an editor will not accept a paper for publication if it doesn't match the scope of their journal. For example, a paper about strategies to minimise falls in the elderly will not be published in the *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*. Similarly, papers reporting research findings will not be published in *Nurse Researcher*, which only publishes research methodology papers. By selecting the right journal in which to publish, authors can avoid disappointment and wasted time in having to revise the paper to meet the requirements of another journal.

### 3. Lack of originality.

*"Please make a clear statement about what this paper adds to the current body of knowledge."*

Journals are always seeking to publish research papers that offer their readers an original insight. Editors and reviewers will ask: "What does this paper add to what is already known?" Authors can improve the chances of having their paper accepted for publication if they can include statements about the originality of what they are presenting and how their research might have an impact on patient care (McClelland, 2006). Papers that have nothing new to say are unlikely to be published.

### 4. Flaws in study design.

*"Your paper has been peer reviewed and the reviewers have highlighted some methodological flaws in your research."*

If seeking to publish research findings, one of the key factors influencing whether a paper will be accepted for publication is the design of the research. The journal's peer reviewers and editor will want to be reassured that the research has been conducted in a methodologically rigorous manner and that readers can have confidence in the findings of the research. If a flaw is identified in how the research was conducted, then journals will not publish to avoid damaging the journal's reputation. Publishing a research paper that later has to be retracted because a reader has spotted a flaw in the research can cause considerable damage to a journal and to the journal's publishers.

### 5. Poor writing and organisation.

*"Your paper lacks a logical structure, making it difficult to follow the flow of the arguments presented."*

Journal papers need to have a good structure and a logical flow. The author should take the reader on a journey through their paper but if the reader gets lost, because the paper is poorly structured, the reader will stop reading. In the same way, if peer reviewers are finding it hard to work their way through a paper, they are more likely to reject the paper. One of the best ways

to avoid being rejected for this reason is to seek peer review prior to submission to a journal, in the hope that the reviewers will highlight the parts of the paper needing revision rather than waiting for the journal's reviewers to identify the same problems (Ness, et al., 2014). So, the question that authors should ask themselves is 'Am I telling a good story?'

### 6. Poor language, spelling and grammar.

*"There are multiple typographical and grammatical errors in this paper, which sometimes detract from the flow of the paper. Please, undertake a careful proofread and edit."*

Papers submitted to journals must be well written with attention to detail. If there are basic errors in the way the paper is written, including misplaced apostrophes and the random scattering of comas, these will need to be corrected before the paper can be considered for publication and the editor and the journal's editorial teams will not have the time to do this. Such errors can also detract from the flow of the text or might even alter the meaning of the text. Often papers are submitted to journals too soon and don't appear to have been subjected to a final proofread and edit. There is an understandable urgency to get published, but sometimes taking a little time to ensure a paper is ready to submit can save considerable time in getting published.

### 7. Poorly presented visual elements.

*"The figures and tables you have presented are sometimes unnecessarily complicated and appear to add little to the text."*

Research papers should be easy to read and this includes the visual elements within papers, including tables, figures and diagrams. These should be clear, easy to read and should add to the paper's text. On too many occasions, these visual elements are too complicated and it is not clear to the editor or the peer reviewers why they have been added.

### 8. Unintentional ethical issues.

*"It is this journal's policy only to publish research where research ethics approval was obtained before commencing the research. Please add a statement confirming that research ethics approval was obtained. If you are unable to do this, we will not be able to consider publishing this paper."*

Ethical issues can be subdivided into two categories: research ethics and publication ethics (Stichler, 2014). If a paper is presenting research findings where the research involved human participants, the journal will not consider publishing the paper if research ethics approval was not sought before beginning the research. Journals will usually expect a statement confirming this

in the methods section of the paper. The journal will also want to be reassured that the content of the paper has not been plagiarised and that the paper has not been submitted to another journal. Whilst researchers and authors might be under considerable pressure to publish, it is never acceptable to breach the principles of publication ethics. With modern technology, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get away with such breaches. Most journals will now submit all papers to software that will examine similarity to other papers and it is not uncommon to identify papers that do contravene these basic principles.

In seeking to publish their research, authors should consider each of the above issues. Sometimes, if one of these issues is not quite right, the editor might invite the author to undertake revisions to improve the paper. There is, however, an accumulative effect, so if there are multiple issues, then the editor is more likely to reject the paper either before or after peer review.

It is a considerable frustration to many editors that good papers are often presented badly, making it difficult for the journal to consider the paper for publication (Griffiths & Norman, 2016). A journal's pool of peer reviewers is an extremely valuable resource and editors will be reluctant to burden them with reviewing papers when there is clearly a fundamental problem with the paper. Having a paper rejected for publication will also cause authors considerable frustration so it makes sense to seek to address these common causes of rejection before submitting a paper.

The objective for authors should be to avoid receiving feedback as highlighted above. In doing so, I would suggest that they will move more quickly between submission and publication. Journals will not miss or overlook these issues so it makes little sense for authors not to address them before asking an editor to read their paper. Publishing and sharing research has become such an important part of what nurse researchers do and has become a priority in a health environment in which all practice should be evidence based. It is hoped that this Editorial has offered some insight into what authors can do to get published without delay.

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### *Slovenian translation/Prevod v slovenščino*

Danes, ko bi naj bil vsak vidik zdravstvene nege obveščen o najboljših dostopnih dokazih, je bolj kot v preteklosti pomembno, da medicinske sestre, ki opravljajo raziskovalno delo, svoja odkritja delijo s stroko (Timmins, 2015). To diseminacijo je mogoče doseči na različne načine, npr. s predstavitvami na konferencah ali zadnja leta tudi z uporabo družbenih medijev. Toda kljub sodobnemu tehnološkemu napredku strokovne in znanstvene revije (v nadaljevanju revija) ostajajo eden najbolj učinkovitih načinov za deljenje odkritij raziskav s tistimi, ki bi lahko nove dokaze uporabili v praksi zdravstvene

nege. Dodatna prednost revij je, da ustvarjajo arhiv raziskav in dokazov. Tehnologija je bistveno olajšala dostop do vsebin revij in s trenutno težnjo po objavah v odprtem dostopu bo verjetno kmalu mogoče imeti vpogled v vse objavljene raziskave.

Čeprav je objava raziskovalnega dela pomembna, je še bolj pomembno zagotoviti, da so objavljene le kakovostne raziskave. Nekakovostne raziskave, ki ničesar ne prispevajo k stroki zdravstvene nege, lahko ustvarijo šibko dokazno osnovo, in kar je še bolj pomembno, negativno lahko vplivajo na zdravstveno nego. Glavni način zagotavljanja kakovosti v revijah objavljenega raziskovalnega dela je postopek recenzij (Shattell, et al., 2010). Čeprav pri tem postopku obstaja nekaj težav, recenzije ostajajo najboljši način za pregled oddanih člankov in za odločanje o tem, kaj je za objavo primerno in kaj ni.

Uredniki večine revij k recenziji člankov, oddanih za objavo, povabijo vsaj dva recenzenta. Za večjo objektivnost in nevtralnost recenzijskega postopka so te recenzije v večini primerov anonimne. Po prejemu recenzij se urednik odloči o tem, ali a) članek objaviti, b) avtorje povabiti k oddaji popravkov ali c) članek zavrnuti. Avtorji seveda upajo, da se bodo zavrnutvi izognili, toda možnost zavrnutve je nekaj, kar morajo vsi avtorji sprejeti kot del prizadevanj za objavo članka. Revije včasih članke zavrnejo celo najbolj priznanim in izkušenim avtorjem.

Po uredniških izkušnjah avtorja tega uvodnika obstaja vsaj osem razlogov, zakaj se uredniki odločijo, da članka ne bodo objavili. Če bi avtorji na te dejavnike pomislili pri pripravi in oddaji svojih člankov, bi bilo zavrntev manj, kar bi ustrezalo tako avtorjem kot tudi urednikom, pa tudi recenzentom, saj ne bi ukvarjali s članki, ki se zavrntvi ne morejo izogniti.

### *1. Neupoštevanje navodil avtorjem*

*»Hvala, da ste oddali svoj članek, vendar žal ni bil oddan na način, primeren za objavo. Prosimo, preberite naša navodila avtorjem.«*

Zgornje besedilo se včasih uporablja pri pripravi odgovora avtorju. Vse revije imajo objavljena navodila avtorjem, ki avtorjem pomagajo zagotoviti, da bodo njihovi članki ustrezali osnovnim zahtevam revije. Ta navodila so običajno na voljo na spletnih straneh revij. Avtorji se teh navodil vse prevečkrat ne držijo oz. zahtev revije ne izpolnjujejo. Pogosto npr. prekoračijo postavljene omejitve glede dolžine članka, včasih za več tisoč besed. Ko se to zgodi, uredniki nimajo druge izbire, kot da članek zavrnejo, še preden ga pošljejo v recenzijo.

### *2. Neujemanje s področjem, na katerem revija objavlja*

*»Članek je zanimiv, vendar vsebinsko ne ustreza naši reviji.«*

Tistim, ki želijo objaviti svoj članek, je na voljo veliko revij, zato je ključnega pomena, da avtorji izberejo

tako, ki ustreza njihovemu raziskovalnemu delu. Ne glede na kakovost raziskave urednik članka ne bo sprejel v objavo, če le-ta ne ustreza vsebini njihove revije. Tako npr. članek o strategijah za zmanjšanje števila padcev pri ostarelih ne bo objavljen v strokovni reviji *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*. Prav tako članki, ki poročajo o ugotovitvah raziskav, ne bodo objavljeni v reviji *Nurse Researcher*, saj le-ta objavlja le članke na temo raziskovalnih metod. Z izbiro prave revije za objavo se avtorji lahko izognejo razočaranju in zapravljanju časa s spreminjanjem članka, da bi le-ta izpolnil zahteve druge revije.

### 3. Pomanjkanje izvirnosti

*»Prosimo, jasno navedite, kaj ta članek prispeva k obstoječemu korpusu znanja.«*

Revije si vedno prizadevajo, da bi objavljale raziskovalne članke, ki njihovim bralcem nudijo izvirni vpogled v zdravstveno nego. Uredniki in recenzenti se bodo vprašali, kaj že znanemu članek dodaja. Avtorji svoje možnosti za objavo lahko izboljšajo, če v članek vključijo pojasnila o izvirnosti predstavljene raziskave in pojasnila o potencialnem vplivu njihovega raziskovalnega dela na zdravstveno nego (McClelland, 2006). Članki, ki ne povejo nič novega, najverjetneje ne bodo objavljeni.

### 4. Pomanjkljiv načrt raziskave

*»Vaš članek je bil recenziran in recenzenti so opozorili na nekatere pomanjkljivosti v metodologiji vaše raziskave.«*

Če nekdo želi objaviti izsledke svoje raziskave, je načrt raziskave eden ključnih dejavnikov, ki bo vplival na to, ali bo članek sprejet v objavo ali ne. Recenzenti in urednik revije se bodo želeli prepričati, da je bila raziskava opravljena z uporabo ustreznih metod in da se bralci lahko zanesejo na njene rezultate. Če revije odkrijejo kakšno pomanjkljivost pri izvedbi raziskave, članka ne bodo objavile, saj ne želijo tvegati, da bi bil njihov ugled omadeževan. Objava raziskovalnega članka, ki ga bo treba kasneje preklicati, ker je bralec opazil napako v raziskovalnem delu, lahko reviji in njenim založnikom povzroči veliko škodo.

### 5. Slabo pisanje oz. slaba organizacija članka

*»Vaš članek nima logične strukture, zato je težko slediti toku predstavljenih argumentov.«*

Članki v revijah morajo imeti dobro strukturo in logičen potek. Avtor mora bralca popeljati na potovanje skozi svojo raziskavo, če pa se bralec pri tem zaradi slabe strukture članka izgubi, bo nehal brati. Podobno bodo tudi recenzenti bolj verjetno članek zavrnil, če se bodo težka prebijali skozenj. Eden najboljših načinov, kako se zavrnitvi izogniti, je zato avtorjeva oddaja besedila v recenzijo najprej kolegom šele nato reviji.

Tako lahko avtor dele, na katere je s strani kolegov opozorjen, ustrezno spremeni še pred oddajo članka recenzentom revije, ki bi sicer verjetno opozorili na iste težave (Ness, et al., 2014). Vprašanje, ki si ga morajo avtorji zastaviti, je torej: »Ali pripovedujem dobro zgodbo?«

### 6. Neustrezen jezik, napake v črkovanju in slovnične napake

*»V članku je več tipkarskih in slovničnih napak, kar včasih prekine tok članka. Prosimo, da ga pozorno pregledate in lektorirate.«*

Članki, oddani strokovnim revijam, morajo biti dobro in natančno napisani do najmanjših podrobnosti. Če vsebujejo osnovne napake, kot so napačni skloni ali napačno postavljene vejice, jih bo treba popraviti, preden bodo članki prišli v poštev za objavo, uredniki in uredniške ekipe revije pa za to nimajo časa. Takšne napake lahko prekinejo tok besedila in celo spremenijo njegov pomen. Avtorji članke revijam pogosto oddajo prehitro, tj. preden leti prestanejo končni pregled in lekturo. Razumljivo je, da se avtorjem z objavo mudi, toda včasih lahko s tem, da si pred oddajo vzamejo nekaj časa in zagotovijo, da je članek na oddajo pripravljen, prihranijo veliko časa pri samem postopku objave.

### 7. Slabo oblikovani vizualni elementi

*»Slike in tabele, ki ste jih predstavili, so včasih nepotrebno zapletene in ni videti, da bi dosti prispevale k besedilu.«*

Raziskovalni članki morajo biti lahko berljivi, kar vključuje tudi vizualne elemente, kot so tabele, slike in diagrami. Ti morajo biti jasni in pregledni ter morajo nekaj dodati k besedilu članka. Vse prevečkrat so takšni vizualni elementi preveč zapleteni in uredniku ali recenzentom ni jasno, zakaj so bili dodani.

### 8. Nenamerne etične pomanjkljivosti

*»Politika naše revije je, da objavlja le raziskave, ki so pred začetkom raziskovalnega dela pridobile etično odobritev raziskave. Prosimo, priložite izjavo, ki potrjuje, da ste pridobili etično odobritev. Če tega ne morete storiti, postopka za objavo članka ne bomo mogli nadaljevati.«*

Etična vprašanja lahko razdelimo v dve kategoriji: raziskovalna etika in etika objavljanja (Stichler, 2014). Če članek predstavlja izsledke raziskave, v katero so bili vključeni ljudje, uredništvo ne bo obravnavalo o njegovi morebitni objavi, če pred začetkom raziskave ni bila pridobljena etična odobritev. Običajno revije pričakujejo, da bo poglavje z metodami vključevalo izjavo, ki to potrjuje. Revija se bo želela tudi prepričati, da članek ni plagiat in da ni bil oddan v objavo drugi reviji. Čeprav so raziskovalci in avtorji lahko pod

velikim pritiskom, da si zagotovijo objavo, kršenje etičnih načel objavljanja nikoli ni sprejemljivo. S sodobno tehnologijo tovrstne kršitve postajajo vse težje izvedljive. Večina revij danes vse članke pregleda s programsko opremo, ki oceni podobnosti z drugimi članki, in ni neobičajno, da so primeri, ki so v nasprotju s temu osnovnimi načeli, tudi odkriti.

V prizadevanju za objavo svojih raziskav naj avtorji upoštevajo vsakega od zgornjih vprašanj. Včasih urednik, če pri katerem od teh vprašanj odkrije težavo, avtorja pozove k popravkom oz. izboljšavi članka. Pri tem pa velja, da več težav pomeni večjo verjetnost za zavrnitev članka, naj bo to pred ali po recenziji.

Številni uredniki občutijo veliko razočaranje, kadar so vsebinsko dobri članki slabo oblikovani in jih tako težko sprejmejo v objavo (Griffiths & Norman, 2016). Za strokovno revijo so recenzenti, s katerimi sodeluje, izjemno pomembni, zato jih uredniki neradi obremenjujejo s pregledovanjem slabih člankov. Ob zavrnitvi članka bo zelo nezadovoljen tudi avtor, zato je smiselno, da te pogoste vzroke zavrnitve odpravi še pred oddajo.

Cilj avtorjev mora biti torej tudi izogniti se zgoraj opisanim povratnim informacijam. Menim, da bo tako korak od oddaje do objave članka krajši. Revije teh težav ne bodo spregledale ali prezrle, torej nima smisla, da bi jih avtorji ne odpravili, že preden bi urednika zaprosili, naj prebere njihov članek.

Objavljanje rezultatov in njihova izmenjava sta postala zelo pomemben del dela raziskovalcev na področju zdravstvene nege in prednostna naloga v zdravstvenem okolju, v katerem morajo vse prakse temeljiti na dokazih. Upamo, da vam je ta uvodnik pomagal razumeti, kaj lahko avtorji naredijo, da bodo njihovi članki objavljeni brez odlašanja.

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