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Nurses and Publication Success: The Value and Importance of Mentoring

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Nurses and publication success: the value and importance of mentoring. By: Spear HJ, Nurse Author & Editor (Blackwell), 17504910, September 1, 2006, Vol. 16, Issue 3

Nurses and Publication Success: The Value and Importance of Mentoring

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Experienced published nurse authors have unique opportunities to serve as mentors for others interested in writing for publication. In my experience, I have found that the graduate nursing students I teach, as well as seasoned nurses, are interested in writing for publication but are often intimidated by and uninformed about the process. Over the past few years I have had the privilege to come alongside some graduate nursing students and colleagues to provide guidance and support that resulted in publication in peer-reviewed nursing journals. A number of articles have been published in the nursing literature on the value of mentoring beginning writers (Sharps & Benjamin, 1997; Sheridan & Dowdney, 1998; Highfield, 2000; Wills & Kaiser, 2002). Nonetheless, although not a new topic, mentoring is worthy of attention and reinforcement as it is an important activity that is necessary to inspire the next generation of nurse authors throughout the global community. Hence, the main focus of this article is to give some helpful tips and highlight selected experiences related to assisting prospective authors to navigate the course of writing for publication.

The fear factor

It is not surprising that, when talking with graduate students or other nurse colleagues about writing for publication, the theme of fear emerges. For example, comments like, "I?tm)m afraid to have anyone read my work, it' not good enough"; "I am fearful of rejection and of looking like I don?tm)t know what I?tm)m doing"; and "I find the idea of writing for publication to be very intimidating" are frequently expressed. Fear of failure and lack of confidence go hand in hand and are roadblocks to effective writing and publication success. It is important to use an encouraging yet realistic approach when providing guidance and direction for neophyte authors. Good writing is a skill that is learned and takes time and effort to develop. To decrease the fear and anxiety of graduate students in my class who are required to write a scholarly paper for possible publication, I assure them that they are mentored through the writing process and that their papers are viewed as "works in progress." This strategy provides them with opportunities for feedback and revision before the final paper is submitted.

Heinrich et al. (2004) discussed how nurse educators and authors can infect others with the passion for writing through demystifying publication by breaking down the process into attainable steps. Although the following remarks relate to graduate nursing students, they also apply to other nurses:

Give students the opportunity to acknowledge their concerns about writing, as well as their strengths as writers. Once they recognize their fears, students are less likely to be paralyzed by them. (Heinrich, et al., p. 145)

Giving inexperienced nurse authors clear direction about the process of writing for publication, positive encouragement and support, and affirming and addressing their common fears, will better equip them to achieve their writing and publication goals. Beyond the personal sense of accomplishment and pride that comes with publishing an article, beginning authors also need to know that the dissemination of their writing efforts through publication promotes the profession, scholarship, and can enlighten and encourage others.

Start Small, Think Big

Some tend to believe that publication in nursing journals is synonymous with and limited to primary research. Indeed, nursing research and knowledge development are critical to the discipline; however, other types of writing are also of value, informative, and thought-provoking. Graduate nursing students and nurses who aspire to publish need to be encouraged to get their feet wet, so to speak, by submitting letters to editors of nursing journals or by writing personal experience stories or exemplars related to clinical practice and professional issues. Although directing novice authors to write about what they know is an obvious and well-understood piece of advice, it bears repeating. I frequently inform students and nurses to write about their nursing practice experiences and encourage them to submit case examples or clinically-oriented "lessons learned" pieces to their respective specialty journals. Other venues for initial publication are hospital circulars, school-based newspapers, and the editorial section of a local newspaper. Achieving the first publication will boost confidence and may stir a new author to pursue the development and publication of more complex and in-depth material.

Writing is all about rewriting

One graduate nursing student told me, "I could never write like this" after reading a clinical practice-focused anecdotal journal article that another graduate student had published. This presented a teaching moment as I explained that the article in print did not start out that way. It probably involved writing several drafts, followed by a few rounds of proof reading and subsequent editing. My point was to tell this student that writing is a process and that the final product is the result of a number of phases. Beginning authors need to understand that writing for publication in reality means rewriting. Recently a nurse emailed me to report that two papers that she had written while a graduate student had been accepted for publication. This former graduate student went on to say that she did not think that she could "do it" [write for publication], but further stated that she is now inspired to pursue other writing projects and is looking forward to preparing the next manuscript for submission. Experiencing that first success is a powerful motivator for future writing. Another nurse colleague just experienced the acceptance of her third

manuscript and is now being called upon by her peers to mentor them about the exciting, albeit challenging, endeavour of writing for publication.

Mentoring tips for new authors

For experienced nurse authors who mentor or are interested in mentoring, the following listing of some widely-known and perhaps new strategies for budding authors can be incorporated into a plan of action designed to increase their likelihood of publication success:

- Think of all meaningful nursing and professional experiences as possible topics for writing.
- Carefully review the purposes, aims, and content of potential journals to determine the "fit" of your manuscript.
- When reviewing journals for possible submission, consider international publications.
- Routinely read journal articles about your selected field and specialty area of practice to facilitate identification of the need for further study, editorial response, or to address relevant issues from a professional development or theoretical perspective. Also, read journal articles to gain insight into how to write journal articles.
- In the beginning stages of manuscript development, do not hesitate to send queries to editors about your ideas for an article.
- Develop a timeline that includes target dates for tasks such as conducting a literature review, selection of journal for submission, completion of first draft, peer review and self-edit of subsequent drafts, and submission of final manuscript.
- Have a backup plan. Identify at least three or four potential journals and rank them based on your first and last choice for publication. Submit your work to your preferred journal, then resubmit to the other journals as needed [manuscripts must be submitted exclusively to one journal at a time].
- Although your manuscript must be clearly written and formatted according to the guidelines of the selected journal, do not expect perfection with your initial submission. Manuscripts must undergo formal review so that further development and editing can proceed based on the feedback of peer reviewers and editors.
- When submitting a revised manuscript in response to an editor's request, include in your cover letter a table that summarizes the reviewers?tm) feedback and your responses.
- Even experienced authors submit manuscripts that are not accepted. If your manuscript is "rejected" understand that this is part of the process; learn from the reviewers?tm) feedback, revise as you see fit and resubmit to another journal.
- Think in terms of "when" your manuscript is accepted not "if" your manuscript is accepted: perseverance is a key factor.

Summary

Without doubt, most nurses owe their publication successes to other nurse authors who took the time to give them invaluable encouragement and support. Nurses can experience personal rewards and satisfaction by assisting others to successfully write for publication. Mentoring for writing and publication is and should remain an ongoing nursing tradition. Of course all who are mentored will not necessarily become published authors. Ultimately, it is up to the one receiving

the mentoring to achieve the goal of publication. However, mentoring is critical to the promotion of scholarship, creative expression, and continued professional development.

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