

# Effective medical writing: the nuts and bolts

Ng K H, Peh W C G

Words. No, not the hit song bearing that name, written and sung by the Bee Gees back in 1968, the one that begins “Smile an everlasting smile...”, but important tools of the trade for doctors and scientists involved or interested in research and scientific writing.

Do we need to be fantastic wordsmiths? Not really, but it is advantageous to be able to write clearly and effectively. A successful researcher is usually a good communicator who has the ability to maximise transmission of his or her research findings, in writing or by other means, to an audience of scientific peers and to the public.

The importance of possessing good writing skills is widely recognised. Unfortunately, few doctors or scientists are intuitively endowed with such skills. Medical writing and construction of manuscripts for scientific journals follow certain expected conventions, which authors are expected to be familiar with. Towards this end, there is a need for a series of continuing medical education (CME) articles written in a user-friendly format for healthcare professionals who are interested in scientific writing. The Singapore Medical Journal is proud to announce the inauguration of a new series, entitled “Effective medical writing”, which will be launched in our next issue.

Though primarily aimed at readers of the Singapore Medical Journal, i.e. doctors, other healthcare professionals who are expected to benefit from reading this series will include basic medical scientists; allied health professionals such as pharmacists, nurses, radiographers, physiotherapists and clinical psychologists; as well as laboratory scientists and technologists. These articles may also be of appeal to medical and postgraduate students, clinical specialty trainees, aspiring researchers, newly-

appointed academic staff, and those who are required to write a thesis or publish scientific papers.

The articles will be written in an easy-to-read style, focusing on how to prepare manuscripts for biomedical and healthcare publications. It aims to comprehensively educate the reader about the “nuts and bolts” of manuscript processing and other “must-know” issues relating to authoring, reviewing, editing and publishing biomedical and healthcare manuscripts. The articles will draw on both the authors’ combined experience in directing and teaching at many scientific writing workshops; as well as writing and refereeing for peer-reviewed journals; editing journals; authoring books and book chapters; and supervising and examining postgraduate theses.

We intend to cover all the steps for preparing a scientific manuscript for publication. The following topics will be included:

- Types and structure of a scientific paper
- How to prepare the title, abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, and discussion
- How to design effective tables and graphs
- How to cite references
- How to submit the manuscript
- How a manuscript is processed
- The review process
- Dealing with editors and proofs

We hope that our readers will benefit from the articles in this series and find success in their writing endeavours. The local and regional scientific community should aim to work towards a future where the standards of scientific writing and publication improve in parallel with the quality of scientific research and healthcare.

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