

Creating a Peer Network to Support Publication by Graduate Students in Nursing

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Publication is a key product of the knowledge generation process in nursing; it is also a performance measure in both the university setting and with funding bodies. Earlier this year, Grech and Evans (2012) described the barriers faced by junior faculty and the importance of providing support to encourage publications in high-ranked peer reviewed journals. Similarly, graduate students experience pressures and barriers related to publication—lack of time and experience, difficulty responding to reviews, and rejection. Strategies to support students' publication efforts have been described in the literature: supervisor support and writing courses and workshops offered by the university or school of nursing (Belcher 2009; Cuthbert & Spark 2008; Lei & Chang, 2009). In this paper we describe a novel strategy developed by graduate students in nursing to create a supportive environment for students wanting to pursue publication – a student-led peer-support network called Summer Pub Club. We describe our program and how it helped graduate students gain skills and experience writing for publication.

The Program

The project took place at the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia (UBC), a research-intensive university in Western Canada. The Summer Pub Club (so named to point to

the venue for the event – a pub on campus – as well as the purpose of the initiative) grew out of informal discussions among students who shared an interest in gaining skills and experience writing. The need for additional support for publication was confirmed in a survey of graduate students in nursing at the University, in which approximately 30% of respondents indicated they would like to publish but did not have the support they needed to do so.

As with other successful initiatives to support publication by graduate students such as described by Belcher (2009), students attending Summer Pub Club were invited to bring preliminary writing from a class, thesis work, or clinical experience to be developed into a manuscript for publication. The aim of the group was to create a peer network of students who aimed to submit an article for publication by the end of the summer and to encourage and support collaborations among the participants. Collectively participants garnered support from faculty members to whom they were not connected through coursework or supervision, and this support enabled participants to develop specific skills such as writing in teams. The peer-support component provided encouragement and accountability, as well as opportunities to develop collaborations and work in teams to improve the quality and breadth of submissions.

Summer Pub Club consisted of six sessions over a three-month period. This short but intensive timeline was created for students to submit an article in time to potentially have a manuscript accepted and included in fall applications to national funding competitions. The summer months are also a time when many students have less coursework and more time available for writing. All current and incoming students across the three graduate programs, Master of Science in Nursing, Master of Nursing: Nurse Practitioner, and Doctor of Philosophy, were invited by email

to participate in Summer Pub Club. The email invitation included a link to a survey that served as registration for the group. The survey asked registrants to provide information about their particular learning needs, indicate their areas of clinical and research interest, the provisional title of the paper they planned to submit for publication, and the origin of the paper (eg, course papers, thesis work, clinical project, and others).

The Pub Club sessions were a combination of informal peer-support meetings and workshops with faculty members. The group met six times; four were informal peer-support meetings and two incorporated faculty workshops on publishing. At each of the peer-support meetings, group members discussed the progress of their writing, asked for feedback from the group on particular challenges, and set personal goals for their next steps in the publication process. At each meeting the group also discussed planning for faculty-led workshops to address knowledge gaps.

There were two workshops held to meet students' common needs and knowledge gaps that could be addressed by well-seasoned authors. The first workshop was a session on writing a theoretical paper for publication, facilitated by a professor with experience as an editor of a theoretical nursing journal. The workshop was opened to all graduate students in the School, not only the Pub Club members, and was attended by 12 graduate students at different stages in their program. A second workshop to address writing in teams was organized for the early fall.

One student served as the facilitator for the Summer Pub Club. In her role she promoted the Summer Pub Club to all graduate students in nursing, administered the initial survey about publication plans and learning needs, and planned a provisional agenda for the first meeting. The

facilitator drew on her existing relationships with faculty members to arrange workshops according to the needs of the Summer Pub Club group. She also coordinated the meetings and promoted the workshops to other students.

Outcomes

The Summer Pub Club has promoted productivity, collaboration, and confidence among graduate students seeking to improve their skills and experience in writing for publication. Positive outcomes relate to the group experience itself and progress on publications.

The Peer-Support Group

Three MSN students and three PhD students at various stages of their programs attended the initial Summer Pub Club meeting. Students' areas of clinical focus varied from infertility to geriatrics, primary healthcare, and acute care cardiac services, and these interests were reflected in the variety of content areas addressed in our manuscripts. Involving students from across programs and with a range of experience in writing for publication created a rich base of expertise. Students' varied experience facilitated the exchange of ideas—students who had published before commented on how they selected a target journal, and students who were publishing for the first time had the opportunity to articulate their target audience and contribution that their paper would make to the discipline. The meetings took place in classrooms as well as informal meeting locations depending on the needs of the group; convenience was the most important factor in choosing a location.

Publications

Although students at times had challenges meeting their goals for each session, all participants made progress between Summer Pub Club sessions. Of the five students who continued with the group, eight manuscripts are nearing completion, and at least four will be submitted by the end of the summer. Group members found that monthly goal-setting created a measure of accountability that motivated students to work on their manuscripts. In spite of the competing demands on students' time (eg, employment and family commitments, thesis work), all group members made progress on publications that would have been otherwise sidelined.

In addition to the manuscripts that each student brought to the group, the peer-support format created unique opportunities for students to collaborate and co-author manuscripts for publication. As an example, two students had conversations about ideas that arose from a conference they had both attended, and by the end of Summer Pub Club, they had drafted an outline and abstract for a paper developing those ideas further.

Workshops

The workshops were intended to provide information about the publication process and valuable knowledge from faculty with years of experience. A key, yet unforeseen, outcome of the workshops was that they served to increase students' confidence in the process of writing for publication. Interaction with experienced faculty who supported students' efforts to publish and

encouraged them to take on the challenge of publishing early in their academic careers was a motivating experience for the group. The workshops also provided an opportunity to engage students who were unable to commit to regular pub club meetings in learning about publication.

Summary

Future considerations for the growth and sustainability of the Pub Club initiative include: ways to support master's nurse practitioner students, a group that was not represented, whether a similar initiative could support nursing colleagues in clinical practice, and if the Pub Club could bring together students from various health disciplines. Further, we hope that future offerings of Pub Club will help us to better understand the role of faculty in encouraging students to publish.

Graduate students in nursing experience pressure to publish, but existing resources are not always sufficient to enable students to develop the confidence needed to pursue publication. This article has described a time-limited, student-led peer-support strategy that complements existing resources to promote publication among graduate students in nursing. Through collaborations with student colleagues and a workshop series by experienced faculty, a network of students provided mutual support that resulted in writing productivity and new possibilities for partnering on publications.

References

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