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Encouraging practitioners in infection prevention and control to publish: A cross-sectional survey

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this cross-sectional survey was to determine the views of infection prevention and control practitioners (IPCPs) on publishing research.

**Methods:** A convenience sample was obtained by approaching delegates at the 2015 Infection Prevention Society conference and data was captured via a hand-held electronic device.

**Findings:** Of the 79 respondents most (83%) read *Journal of Infection Prevention* (JIP) and found it useful for informing their practice (72%). However, most (91%) had never published in JIP, and less than half (40%) published elsewhere. The main barrier to publication was not having work suitable for publication (38%). Support (37%), training in writing for publication (10%) and time (9%) were considered to be important facilitators in encouraging respondents to publish.

**Discussion:** Strategies that support IPCPs in developing their writing skills may encourage more IPCPs to disseminate evidence to support best practice by publishing their work in peer reviewed journals.

## Keywords:

Barriers and facilitators; writing for publication

## Introduction

Dissemination of the findings from research is essential in order to support evidence-based practice. Publication in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Infection Prevention* (JIP) is acknowledged as the key strategy for dissemination, in addition to being an important indicator of both institutional and individual achievement in research (Kapp et al 2011 and Rickard et al 2009). Publishing findings not only provides tangible outcomes but is important for academic recognition and continuing professional development (Kapp et al 2011). Despite these benefits, many researchers never publish their work and a study by Hicks (1993) highlights the extent of this problem. Only one percent from a sample size of 550 midwives published their work, even though almost two thirds had conducted self-initiated research (Hicks 1993). More current research has also indicated that there are still barriers for nurses writing for publication (Albarran and Scholes 2005). Some common barriers to writing for publication reported in the literature appear to be: lack of time; lack of confidence; difficulty in identifying how to start and what to write; inexperience and lack of knowledge of the process (Dowling et al 2013, Keen et al 2007, McGrail et al 2006, Staudt et al 2003). Some less frequently mentioned obstacles are: fear of their work being rejected; lack of skills in academic writing; lack of support and resources; personal responsibilities (Kapp et al 2007, Keen et al 2007, Staudt et al 2003).

This cross-sectional survey study was conducted at the Infection Prevention Society (IPS) 2015 Conference in Liverpool to establish participants' views on publishing their research, particularly in JIP. The aim of the survey was to increase participants'

awareness of the potential for publishing in JIP and to understand the factors that would encourage IPCPs to publish in this journal.

## Methods

A questionnaire was developed in SurveyMonkey© and face validity was checked by members of the JIP Editorial Management Group and the IPS Consultative Committee. A convenience sample was obtained by approaching delegates and asking them to complete the survey via a hand-held electronic device. Consent was implied by willingness to participate in the survey. The questionnaire consisted of twelve questions (Table I). All questions had pre-defined options (except question seven which allowed free text), to ensure quick completion and good response rates. Not all questions were required to be answered by all respondents. Some questions only allowed one option to be chosen whilst other questions permitted more than one option to be selected. One question used a Likert scale. Descriptive analysis using frequencies and percentages was used to analyse the responses. Content analysis (Silverman 2010) identified themes from free text and was used to report on the most frequent responses.

Table I Questionnaire on publishing

| Topic 1: Survey respondents demographics |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Question 1</b>                        | Are you an IPS member? (Yes/No/Don't know)   |
| <b>Question 2</b>                        | What is your job role? (Pre-defined options – only one option could be selected)   |
| Topic 2: JIP                             |  |
| <b>Question 3</b>                        | Have you ever read JIP? (Yes/No/Don't know) (If 'No' or 'Don't know' respondent automatically taken to question 6)         |
| <b>Question 4</b>                        | How many times a month on average do you access, either as a paper copy or online? (1 to 10)                               |
| <b>Question 5</b>                        | Overall how would you rate the value of JIP for informing your practice? (Scale from: 0=not useful to 10=extremely useful) |
| Topic 3: Papers/topic of interest        |  |
| <b>Question 6</b>                        | What types of papers are of most interest to you? (Pre-defined options – more than one option could be selected)           |
| <b>Question 7</b>                        | What topics are of most interest to you? (Free text)   |
| Topic 4: Publishing                      |  |
| <b>Question 8</b>                        | Have you published in JIP? (Yes/No/Don't know)   |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Question 9</b>  | Have you published your work elsewhere? (Yes/No/Don't know)   |
| <b>Question 10</b> | Would you consider publishing in JIP in the future? (Yes/No/Don't know) (If 'Yes' respondent automatically taken to question 12)                    |
| <b>Question 11</b> | Which of the following describes your main reason for not submitting your research/study? (Pre-defined options – only one option could be selected) |
| <b>Question 12</b> | What would encourage you to publish your work? (Predefined options - more than one option could be selected)  |

## Results

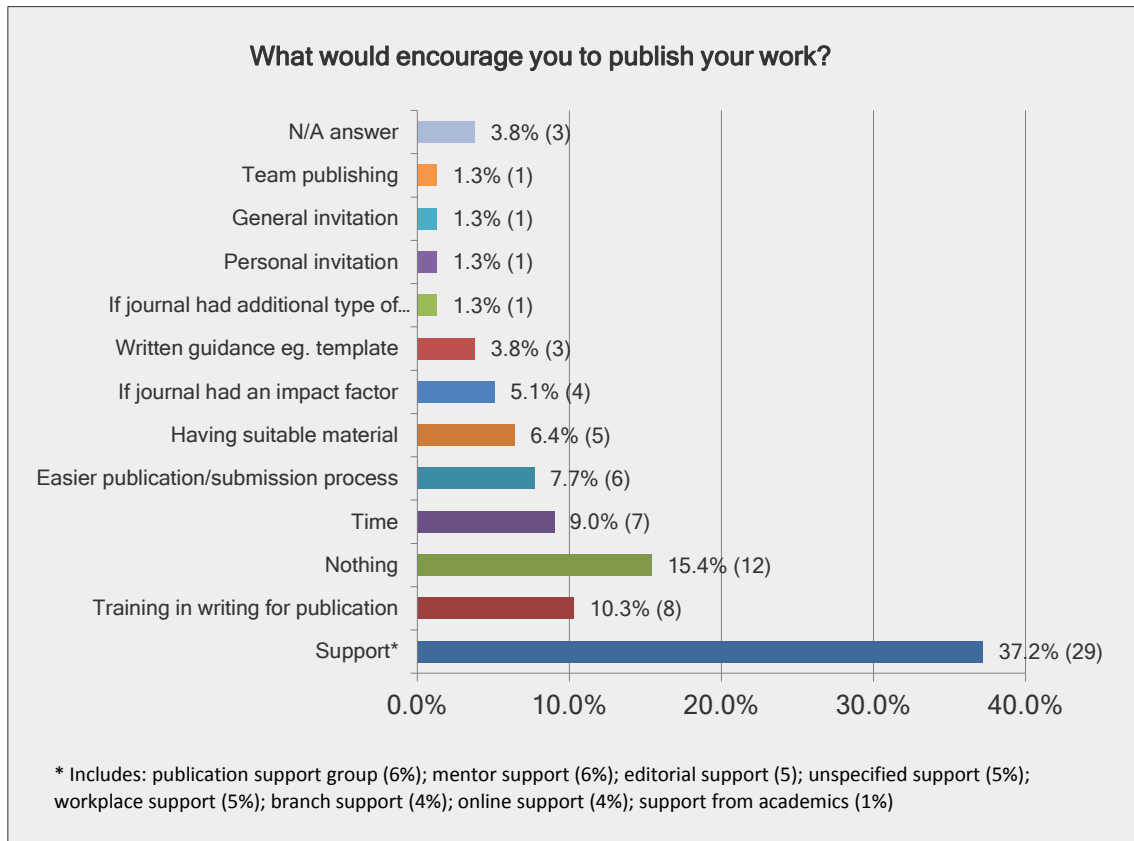
The total number of participants who completed the survey was 79; of these 58 (73%) were IPS members and 65 (83%) indicated that they read JIP. Forty-five (58%) of the survey respondents worked in an infection prevention and control job role.

Respondents preferred to read the hard copy of JIP (n=56, 89%) rather than online (n=24, 38%), with most reading it once or twice a month (n=45, 90%). Most respondents read JIP soon after receiving it and 47 (72%) rated it as useful for informing their practice (score of between 7 and 10).

Overall 72 (91%) of respondents have never published in JIP, although 29 (40%) have published elsewhere. Although, 16 (20%) participants would not consider publishing in JIP in the future, the main reason given for this was 'I don't have anything suitable for publication' (n=6, 38%). Some of the other reasons given for not publishing in JIP were: never having written for publication (n=4, 25%); lack of time (n=3, 19%); lack of confidence (n=1, 6%) and not having the necessary skills (n=1, 6%). The most common factor mentioned that would encourage respondents to publish was the provision of some type of support (n=29, 37%), followed by training in writing for publication (n =8; 10%) and time (n=7; 9%) (Figure I).



Figure I Factors that would encourage respondents to publish their work



## Discussion

Although many previous studies have investigated specific approaches to support writing for publication, this survey has gathered opinions about barriers and facilitators to publishing directly from healthcare professionals attending an infection prevention and control conference. The key barriers to writing for publication identified in this survey were not having suitable work to publish, lack of writing experience, confidence or skills and insufficient time. These mirror those reported in earlier literature (Dowling

et al 2013, Keen et al 2007, McGrail et al 2006, Staudt et al 2003). A systematic review of the interventions to increase publication rates concluded that writing courses, writing mentorship and support groups are all facilitators in helping support and motivate authors to publish their work (McGrail et al 2006). This is borne out by this survey which indicated that support from others and training in writing for publication were the most important factors that would encourage respondents to publish.

Writing is a skill which can be taught and learned (Rickard et al 2009). Training can be delivered in various formats such as writing courses, workshops or via writing seminars. Two studies explored how writing courses can help and support writing for publication (Richardson and Carrick-Sen 2011, Murray and Newton 2008). Murray and Newton's (2008) qualitative study involved interviewing allied health professionals who had previously attended a six month writing for publication course and discovered that those who attended had improved writing confidence, enhanced writing skills and increased publication productivity. Another study outlined the effect of a five session writing seminar series on encouraging publishing behaviours amongst nurses and found this approach to be more effective in increasing publication rates than a one day workshop (Lawrence and Folcik 1996).

Time to write was also cited as a factor which would aid publishing, although this can be challenging for those working in clinical settings where other aspects of the role may be perceived to take precedence. Murray and Newton (2008) highlighted the

importance of providing ongoing support to writers after course attendance to ensure time and space to write is provided within the workplace. There are different types of support and support groups and mentor support were mentioned as key approaches by our respondents to help facilitate them to publish. The practical and psychological benefits of these support methods have also been regularly documented in other studies and include: information sharing; discussion; constructive feedback; motivation; confidence; encouragement; peer support (Frantz et al 2011, Richardson and Carrick-Sen 2011, Keen 2007, Rickard et al 2009, Steinert et al 2008). Facilitating both time and support systems for writing for publication should be recognised as essential since the UK competences for practitioners in infection prevention and control require that they both participate in and disseminate knowledge from research and other related activities (Burnett 2011). Sharing evidence from research or the implementation of novel practice is also fundamental to assuring high quality infection prevention and control services (Wilson 2015).

An easier publication and submission process and the provision of written guidance were also reported as factors which would encourage respondents to publish and these findings are supported in a study by Staudt et al (2003) which suggested that courses and curriculums should provide information on the publication process. Collaborative writing involves a team of writers working together to produce a publication and is a useful process for inexperienced writers because they can be supported by more experienced writers, thereby enhancing quality and productivity (Price 2014 and Keen 2007).

In conclusion, this survey has highlighted that whilst many IPC practitioners value JIP in informing their own practice, most are reluctant to publish themselves. Provision of training in writing for publication and support through mentorship are strategies that may encourage more practitioners to disseminate their work through publication.

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#### Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest