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Nursing knowledge production: from the research idea to the publishing in a qualified journal

PRODUÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO EM ENFERMAGEM: DA IDÉIA DA PESQUISA À PUBLICAÇÃO EM PERIÓDICO QUALIFICADO

PRODUCCIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO EN ENFERMERÍA: DE LA IDEA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN A LA PUBLICACIÓN EN PERIÓDICOS CALIFICADOS

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ABSTRACT

The motivations for writing this article were the difficulties found in producing and publishing Nursing knowledge and also to present scientific authors with suggestions that improve and streamline the process of elaborating and synthesizing knowledge, research results and reflections. Besides discussing the content of components that form the structure of a scientific text, this article will also provide publishing policies that assist authors in choosing the correct journal for publishing, the desirable characteristics of language and text elaboration, and the procedures for publishing a manuscript. This article will also evidence the partnership between authors, reviewers and editors on the process of creating and publishing articles, which is not always appraised by the main agents of the development and publishing of scientific texts that portray the development and the performance of the profession.

KEY WORDS

Nursing research.
Publications for science diffusion.
Periodicals as topic.
Systems for evaluation of publications.
Scientific and technical publications.
Publication components.

RESUMO

As dificuldades para produção de conhecimento em Enfermagem e para publicação dessa produção motivaram a criação deste texto que apresenta aos autores de publicações científicas sugestões para agilizar e otimizar o processo de elaborar e sintetizar o conhecimento, resultado de suas pesquisas e reflexões. Além da descrição do conteúdo dos componentes que formam a estrutura do texto científico, são apresentadas as diretrizes do processo de escolha do periódico para publicação, as características desejáveis da linguagem na construção do texto e os procedimentos para encaminhamento do manuscrito para publicação. Evidencia-se também a parceria de autores, pareceristas e editores no processo de criação de artigos para publicação, nem sempre percebida e valorizada por esses atores principais do desenvolvimento e divulgação dos textos científicos que retratam o desenvolvimento e a atuação da profissão.

DESCRITORES

Pesquisa em enfermagem.
Publicações de divulgação científica.
Publicações periódicas como assunto.
Sistemas de avaliação das publicações.
Publicações científicas e técnicas.
Componentes de publicações.

RESUMEN

Las dificultades para producción de conocimiento en Enfermería y para publicación de esa producción motivaron la creación de este texto que presenta a los autores de publicaciones científicas, sugerencias para agilizar e optimizar el proceso de elaboración y síntesis del conocimiento, resultado de sus investigaciones y reflexiones. Más allá de la descripción del contenido de los componentes que forman la estructura del texto científico, se presentan directrices del proceso de elección del periódico para publicación, las características deseadas del lenguaje en la construcción del texto y los procedimientos de encaminamiento del manuscrito para publicación. Se evidencia también la agrupación de autores, consultores y editores en el proceso de creación de artículos para publicación, que ni siempre es percibida y valorada por los autores principales del desarrollo y difusión de los textos científicos que retratan el desenvolvimiento y actuación de la profesión.

DESCRIPTORES

Investigación em enfermería.
Publicaciones de divulgación científica.
Publicaciones periódicas como assunto.
Sistemas de evaluación de las publicaciones.
Publicaciones científicas y técnicas.
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KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN NURSING SCIENCE

A profession's scientific production is expected to picture that profession. And what is the *size* of the Nursing profession? Its theories attempt to construct help/care/education actions, so as to move the axis from empirical sciences (particularly biology) towards human sciences.

Nursing work is not solely technical. It does not boil down to routine serial work, but focuses on behavioral aspects (adaptations and independences, for example) and human relations (nurse/patient interactions, orientations, dialogues, families...). Despite this range, some converging aspects can be mentioned, which grant journals the wealth of knowledge that, in the current Brazilian conjuncture, with mostly general journals (affiliated with Graduate Programs), is expressed in its figures:

- It is accepted that reality is multifaceted; that totalizing schemes do not cover its entire magnitude;
- It is accepted that *language* is a constituent factor of subjects and signification, representation and organization systems; therefore, they demonstrate the many *worlds* of the object they act on: the human being;
- It is accepted that relations exist between knowledge, power and truth, which imply the production of and organization of social life and subjects.

In view of the above, the question is asked: what is the range of our journals? Can any limit be set? If the answer is positive and necessary, is that limit technical?

The greater the access to what is being produced, the greater the criticism against the quality of that production. Besides, it can be affirmed that there is as of yet no international consensus on how to assess scientific production.

Nursing journals' participation in the ISI (Web of Science) and SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) databases demonstrate a quantitative and qualitative increase in nursing knowledge production. Even the rise in the number of Brazilian journals in other databases (such as MEDLINE and LILACS) confirms this fact.

The greater the access to what is being produced, the greater the criticism against the quality of that production. Besides, it can be affirmed that there is as of yet no international consensus on how to assess scientific production[1]. This is an interesting fact, as scientific knowledge is knowledge produced by the scientific method (independently of how that is conceived) and accepted by a significant part of the scientific community. A research is done to be read, used, criticized and to motivate reflections on professional practice.

Journals have accepted the challenge of publishing research by different scientific groups/communities, which interpret reality in various ways and focus on (almost) countless aspects of a same fact or situation. For this purpose, they seek structured articles with a good writing technique, simple, clear, well presented and, one may say, *good-looking*. Their title should already express the essence of the study (the goal or conclusion); the introduction should *guide* the reader towards the premises that lead to the goal; in the method, the *step-by-step* description should allow for reliable replication; the results and discussion should provide information to permit a clear conclusion. This care produces synthetic texts that are fundamental nowadays, given high publication costs.

Authors aim for acknowledgement and international understanding. English is the language of health *science*; therefore, its clear reasoning (independently of *style*) should generate a short text, where phrases are constructed with *the causes preceding the effects*.

Journal editors have also sough international acknowledgement, knowing that the range of a scientific text is defined by the conclusions it has drawn; that the argument about a text being specifically of interest to one single site can be refuted by the fact that research generally quotes studies performed in different places, using different research models, as what is most common in science is for study samples to serve as models that produce valid conclusions for larger populations. A good discussion of data permits conclusions of *international* interest.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR DIFFUSION

If a research is conducted with methodological rigor and leads to reliable results, one may expect manuscripts based on the research to be published. That is the intent of all researchers and academic professionals. Reality is quite different, however, as not all studies result in a successful publication. The manuscript rejection level is high, often exceeding 50%. It is known that prestigious journals' acceptance ratio is low (10 to 35%) when compared with submissions[2]. The growing number of submissions to journals and the reduced space available for publications reduces the manuscript acceptance ratio. In REEUSP, in the last two years, the acceptance ratio corresponded to 55.9%. There are basically two reasons for rejecting a manuscript: (1) aspects related to the paper's quality with regard to the selected journal, whether the paper is a research or another mode, involving methodological frailties, badly presented ideas or lack of discussion of the results, among others, and (2) technical aspects of manuscript preparation, either related to very long or short manuscripts, without a balance among different parts, with many or few citations, to mention an endless range of possibilities in this domain.

The main sources of articles published in specialized journals today are the products of graduate programs, particu-

larly doctoral dissertations and master's theses. What many authors perhaps do not know is that the dissemination of this material should be carefully planned. Questions should be answered, even when the research is in course and, hence, unfinished. What is the best way to disseminate the obtained knowledge? How many articles will be produced based on the dissertation or thesis? Answering these questions means that a publication plan starts during the research development. After completing the literature review, an article can be elaborated, reminding that this kind of article should be a synthesis of available knowledge, instead of a commented bibliography. After concluding the study, the author should decide whether the research will be divided in several papers or presented in one single piece. The potential to generate one or multiple articles is obviously determined by the research's consistency. Some studies do not permit more than one article, as the risks of duplicate publication can make the author vulnerable. Hence, in planning publications, the author should consider the research's capacity and his/her own capacity to write sufficiently well to have a paper accepted and published.

One important focus refers to qualitative research articles. The author needs to know that there are certain criteria to present manuscripts deriving from this kind of research. Qualitative research represents a considerable part of academic production nowadays and corresponds to an equally considerable part of rejected manuscripts, because authors do not pay attention to criteria that determine the paper's quality and that should be taken into account. Some criteria are essential for any qualitative report, such as the rigor appropriate in these studies, but there are specific essential criteria for each qualitative method, such as theoretical sampling in Grounded Theory, or the description of cultural themes in Ethnography. Not paying attention to or not knowing about these essential details can lead to vulnerable and unspecific manuscripts in methodological terms, as all of them may contain the same aspect of content analysis.

Formatting a qualitative research with regard to the guidelines of journals that do not specifically publish that kind of report can be hard for an inexperienced author who, when adjusting a text to journal criteria, may ignore essential aspects of this research mode.

WHAT ONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE MANUSCRIPT REVIEW

Submitting a manuscript to a journal raises great expectation in the authors, who always awaits a positive answer: *The manuscript has been accepted for publication*. The fact is that few authors receive this answer during their first interactions with the journal, as publishing a manuscript is a complex process of assessment and review. Few authors can affirm that their manuscripts were accepted without any review upon the first submission, even those who systematically publish many papers.

Reviewers examine manuscripts in terms of their quality as a diffusion product, paying attention to aspects of content itself and to how the paper was constructed, whether it is a research report or not. They also verify whether the paper is adequate to the journal's mission and to the profile of its readers. Today, one important aspect is whether the manuscript topic is limited to local readers or of international interest. It is interesting to consider the review process as academic assistance we give one another. It is voluntary and reciprocal as, while the reviewer works on one manuscript, another reviewer works on the first reviewer's paper[3].

Reviewing is collective and the author needs to feel involved. A manuscript for which review is requested has not been accepted yet, but continues in the analysis process, until it is considered suitable for publication or rejected, despite all efforts to improve the manuscript.

Rejection can hurt the author, who feels some degree of suffering that, if not properly processed, can become fatal for the author or manuscript. In this process, considering the following is useful: rejected manuscripts still have great chances of being published, the peer review process means that almost all authors receive criticism and reviewers gave useful suggestions for free to improve the manuscript[4].

If, for any reason, authors disagree with the comments and find the suggested changes inadequate, they can present their arguments to the editor, including evidence from literature, data or the analysis, which only the authors master.

Having an article published is a great learning experience. Authors should not consider themselves victims of a network that conspires against their academic visibility, but depart from a collaborative network to grant visibility to the best science has produced and to the best readers should consume to improve the quality of their thinking, feeling and acting, as professionals and persons.

CHOOSING A JOURNAL FOR PUBLICATION

For the communication expressed in the writing of an article to reach its target public, the audience one intends to reach needs to be well defined, as the audience with command writing style and language[5]. Authors should consult the *Guidelines for Authors* of the selected journal to find out whether their paper complies with the editorial policy. Another important issue is to choose one journal at a time. A paper should not be simultaneously submitted to more than one journal, as that would go against the ethics of article publication[5].

The journal selected for publishing the paper should be reliable and of good formal and content quality. Preference should be given to journals indexed by Brazilian and

international information sources, with rigid criteria of excellence and regularity[5].

The list of journals assessed by the area and their classifications should also be consulted[6]. A well classified journal is marked by better presentation (standardization), management and visibility[6]. Journals included in databases and made available in different libraries can better disseminate papers. Nowadays, this condition is equally guaranteed by electronic publication, with metadata and full texts available on the internet[6].

If authors are interested, they can consult the journal's scientific impact factor, as measured by the number of times its articles are cited. This measure is calculated by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI/Thomson Reuters) internationally, and by SciELO (BIREME) in Brazil.

TIPS TO WRITE A MANUSCRIPT

Scientific articles should not be long, normally totaling between 5 and 10 pages, and up to 20 pages depending on the type of publication, the kind of research and the journal's standards, guaranteeing, in all cases, that the thematic approach is as comprehensive as possible, that methodological procedures are presented and that results obtained from field research are discussed, in case other researchers need to repeat them[7].

Due to the small size required (publication costs are high in any case), economy and objectiveness are fundamental when presenting information, with a view to maintaining an in-depth treatment of the theme. Hence, related aspects should be taken into account.

• The title should be understandable, concise, call attention and, above all, reflect the main theme (picture the contents) of the paper.

• In general, readers depart from the *resumo, resumen* or abstract to decide whether they are going to read the rest of an article; it should address all steps of the paper: introduction, aims, method, results and discussion.

• The abstract should be a scientific translation of the *resumo*, precisely translating terms and technical expressions.

• As for descriptors, the word or expression that best identifies the subject can be checked in the Nursing Thesaurus of the International Nursing Index, as a supplementary list, in case it is not found in the DECs (Health Sciences Descriptors).

• The introduction should present a pertinent, updated (preferably published in the last 5 years) and specific literature review on the addressed topic, and also indicate the goal of the theme, highlighting the relevance and nature of the problem/the author's concerns, as well as the aims and main arguments justifying the paper.

• Lack of clarity in the methods section is one of the main reasons why papers are rejected. The method does not only need to be appropriate to the type of study proposed, but the use of the theoretical-methodological framework should be explained, as well as ethical principles used in data collection and inclusion criteria (clear and in line with the study goals). Also, the description of the sampling process should be methodologically supported and well written. The methods section should refer to the study's approval by ethics or research committees, when necessary, including the protocol number.

• Most journal guidelines have requested that results be presented before their discussion. The discussion section should clearly confront the findings with current literature. Possible generalizations and/or practical applications or limitations should be mentioned, based on the obtained data.

• The conclusion section can start by presenting what was learned from the study. It should be analytic, interpretative and include explanatory arguments, providing evidence that the problem/concerns were solved by the results obtained in the paper. Future research related to the same problem should be commented on, as well as necessary modifications and/or limitations of the method, which may or may not be overcome.

• When present, *Final Considerations* should be limited to a short explanation of the predominant ideas in the text as a whole, without great polemics or controversy, including the main considerations deriving from the results analysis. New confrontations with literature should be avoided. Depending on the research type and aim, authors can present some general recommendations for further research, raising the public's awareness about important facts, suggesting urgent decisions or more coherent practices by people or groups, with possible contributions the publication can offer to society.

This care will definitely shorten the manuscript content assessment process by peers and editors, avoiding successive returns to the authors for revision or, even worse, rejection.

Writing a scientific journal is not an easy task. It demands authors' capacity and synthesis in writing and great attention to the journal's editorial policy, guidelines and the way submitted manuscripts are judged. This care avoids time loss and disappointments when the editor's response is not positive[1].

Recently, an article published in the journal *Pesquisa Fapesp* (August 28th 2009) discussed the relation between English language proficiency and scientific productivity. The text underlines that Brazilian authors lie outside the English language axis, that the scientific world speaks English and that authors who only publish in Portuguese do not manage to be read and even less to be cited. The

same article discusses that the problem does not only refer to language difficulties as, if that were the case, it could be solved with good translation advice alone. Brazilian researchers lack knowledge and training to understand what a scientific article is and the type of approach to publish in international journals[8].

One study comments[9] that

> [...] one exercise that should be proposed to Graduate students is to detect the article's question. Many students are not able to do that. Moreover, the problem is that the scientific paper is only repeating something that has already been done; mastery of scientific language is lacking, as well as creativity and boldness to produce original contributions; when these aspects are addressed, the least of all problems is to get a good English review service [....].

In addition, there is the style of an international article: short sentences, objective writing, using simple words, being direct (saving words).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers have clearly suffered gross pressure since the establishment of this system, with a clear disadvantage for non-positivist productions.

> Research is not precise, in the sense of being exact as, like living, one knows where it starts, but little is known about where it will end... and, for many researchers, that is the charm of research... in the end, it is not foreseeable. Nursing, as an area essentially characterized by Humanities – it is about life and death, health and disease, suffering, joy and accomplishments, taking and receiving care, work and the work process, meaning and interpretations, the context, conjuncture and structure of society – has peculiar phenomena to investigate and, as opposed to what many admit or desire, ways to disseminate its findings do not always *fit into* models pre-established in current times in the so-called health sciences[10].

What has been the solution for Nursing researchers? To slice up their papers, shorten reflection time and publish totally unimportant texts from the perspective of innovation, discovery and enticement. It is not relevant to publish superficial and *sliced up* knowledge in international trilingual journals like REEUSP, so-called *reverberations* in distinct scenarios of the same method and almost the same conclusions, which do not even consider previous texts, even when written by the same authors. It is not relevant to publish such specific experiences, which do not make any sense to average Brazilian and international readers and are only understood clearly by a fellowship of a dozen people.

On the other hand, it is relevant to publish and publicize discoveries, new knowledge, critical and in-depth reflections, which can be shared with peers and somehow contribute to qualify professional practices in health and particularly in nursing, whether in Brazil or around the world.

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