

Cover Letter

Date: 06/November/2020

To,
The Editor-in-Chief,
The International Journal of Clinical Practice.

Reg: Submission of manuscript entitled “Plain-Language Summaries: An Essential Component to Promote Knowledge Translation” for publication as a perspective.

Dear Editor-in-chief,
I, Sai Krishna Gudi, on behalf of my co-authors, submit the manuscript entitled “**Plain-Language Summaries: An Essential Component to Promote Knowledge Translation**” for publication consideration. I understand the scope and objectives of the IJCP and have formatted the manuscript to fit the style and needs of the journal. Also, I hereby confirm that the manuscript has been prepared for and submitted only to the IJCP and not submitted to any other journal either by me or any of my co-authors in English or any other language and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

Significance of the article: In this era of evidence-based practice, scholarly work such as peer-reviewed scientific publications plays a vital role in policy and decision-making at an individual, organization, and country-level. The main purpose of articulating the scholarly work should be to make it understandable and accessible to everyone, including the lay audience. However, oftentimes, researchers overlook the lay summaries while publishing their research findings. Thus, authors have penned down the importance of plain-language summaries in promoting health-related knowledge translation to the public. We strongly believe that this editorial would be of immense interest to the readers of the journal and as well as the scientific community.

I, Sai Krishna Gudi hereby declare that all the authors have seen and approved the content of the manuscript and have contributed significantly to the work.

Thanking you,

Yours’ sincerely,

Dr. Sai Krishna Gudi

Plain-Language Summaries: An Essential Component to Promote Knowledge Translation

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Abstract

In this era of evidence-based practice, scholarly work such as peer-reviewed scientific publications play a vital role in policy and decision-making at an individual, organization, and country-level. Alongside being considered an essential means of communicating scholarly work, scientific publications also investigate the specific domains that lack well-established literature and thereby inform scientists and researchers to thrive for the betterment of the publics' well-being. Thus, the main purpose of articulating the scientific, scholarly work should be to make it understandable and accessible to everyone, including the lay audience. However, oftentimes, researchers overlook the lay summaries while publishing the research findings.

Keywords: Lay Summary, Plain-Language Summary; Knowledge Translation, Lay Audience, Scientific Publication, Terminology, Scientometrics.

Introduction

Plain-language summary (PLS) is a synopsis of research findings written in an easily understandable way, so that even lay audience would grasp the content¹. It might be science journalists, healthcare practitioners, academic professionals, policymakers or the general public; they need to understand and engage with the research. Often, scientific papers are authored in a complex manner using technical terminology, especially jargons, which indeed makes it challenging, in fact, troublesome to understand for those outside of that field. On this account, to make the science more visible and accessible, various kinds of summaries like PLS, video abstracts, graphical abstracts and podcasts have come into action.¹

PLS Facilitates Knowledge Translation (KT)

The whole idea of KT is to improve the use of evidence-based research in practice, policy and further research. Thus, to do this, those who are using or participating in research need to understand the study first, then the results, including the potential impact that the study would bring to the related field or the society in general. Findings from a recent study found that PLS are the most effective summaries, based on comprehension, understanding, and enjoyment.¹ PLS holds immense potential and could act as a KT tool and thus help researchers widen their reach by making their findings more visible and accessible. However, for most researchers, a PLS might not be a primary priority while submitting a paper to a journal.

Most readers, including academicians and scholars, often find themselves in a loop of not finding scientific articles interesting or have to re-read the lines because the idea cannot be captured at the first read, especially when it comes to the work that emerged from a new area, where the reader does not have much awareness about the topic. For instance, if the entire clinical trial process has been simplified in the way they are conducted, it provides a common man with an idea of knowing the most recent innovations, besides letting them understand scientific literature in their perspectives. It could also be a means of motivation for patients to participate in clinical trials and take advantage of the newer therapies before it can be made available to a wider public.² Thus, it is always important for researchers to keep in mind that any scholarly work aims to make it available to, and understandable by the general public and the scientific community.

Impact of Usage of Jargons on KT

There are both advantages and disadvantages associated with the usage of jargons, and they can vary by depending upon the context they are used.³ One advantage of using jargons in scientific articles is that it gives the researcher a sense of belonging to a specific community. For example, complex or scientific terminology can reduce the time and effort to communicate an idea with an expert or someone from a similar background. In contrast, it could potentially make a reader from a different background feel confused. Thus, any fancy and complicated terminology should be limited to only where there are necessary. Such vocabulary should be supported with simplified definitions wherever applicable so that everyone can benefit from the scholarly work that is done. As people are becoming more tech-friendly and using technology to find about every new thing that they come across, journals and publishers should utilize such resources to connect to the larger audience in a better way so that the context and ideas of the authors can flow with ease into the minds of readers. It is always essential to think from the general public's perspective while drafting a paper, as scholarly work acts as a means of filling the knowledge gap that usually exists between the scientific and non-scientific audiences.

Importance and Initiation of PLS

Commonly, for those outside of academia, scientific research papers would be incomprehensible. Thus, PLS plays an essential role in sharing research findings with individuals from science- or non-science related backgrounds, at a rapid pace.⁴ Also, offering lay summaries bolster the publications connect with the stakeholders and make them understand about the latest research, although they are not embedded in the research community. International scientific organizations such as the Cochrane Collaboration and the Campbell Collaboration advocate and therefore made PLS a mandate for their systematic reviews.⁵ Besides, in 2019, a new European Union (EU) regulation that has been implemented strongly recommends all the sponsors of clinical trials in the EU to publish lay summaries of the trials.⁶ However, PLS should not be limited to clinical trials and systematic reviews but should instead be put into action with other study designs and methodologies.

Considerations to incorporate PLS

Before drafting the research findings, a researcher should consider whether the aim of writing the paper is to reach a wider audience or is limited to only the scholars within the field. It is also essential to keep the intended audience in mind, those who would be benefited from reading and understanding the work that has been done. It is always recommended to use short and simplified sentences, as using jargon could only benefit the scholars within the field.³ At times, it might be challenging for researchers to make their work available open for interpretation by the non-scientific audience, including patients, as it could lead to misinterpretation of their work. However, misinterpretation of scientific information should be considered as an opportunity by the researchers to understand and clarify the questions that arise among non-scientific readers.

Auxiliary Benefits of PLS

PLS not only eases the communication but also enhances the quality of learning by the non-scientific audience in the easiest way possible. A patients' consent to a health intervention cannot be informed unless they understand the information provided by the researcher. Therefore, an unnecessary complex language in a research study's informed consent form could potentially lead to the differences between the researcher and the participants, which eventually might deter volunteers from participating. Thus, PLS could play a vital role in the public's engagement in research. Importantly, PLS offers a way to clearly communicate the research findings to the decision & policymakers to make informed decisions. Although PLS appears to be a simple idea, it is a potential way to enhance the reach, visibility, transparency and impact of any scientific research, which eventually adds a greater number of citations to the researcher's credit.⁷ Thus, researchers should consider lay summaries as an opportunity to contextualize their research and communicate with interested non-specialists. PLS could also serve as an added advantage for both the researcher and the audience, as they make researchers focus on the take-home messages. Also, as PLS reduces cognitive load⁸, everyone would get benefited by employing such communications.

Summary

In a nutshell, thinking from a non-scientific lay audience perspective and keeping them in mind while writing a scientific paper could potentially elucidate the work almost to anyone ranging from a novice to an expert in the field. Such practice would also help gain the general public's

confidence and support, which eventually enhance their participation in research. Therefore, regardless of disciplines and contexts, researchers should consider PLS as one of their priorities while drafting the research findings and should use them as a factual way to enhance the visibility, accessibility and transparency of their scholarly work. Similarly, journals and its publishers should make PLS mandate to leverage its potential benefits in improving their metrics.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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