How to write a paper and get it published in a good medical journal
by Praveen Veerabhadrappa, NIC member

I am thrilled that Dr Stuart Spencer, Executive Editor of The Lancet, has allowed me to script his special guest lecture on ‘How to write a research paper and get it published in a good quality medical journal’ presented during our September 2012 New Investigators’ Symposium in Sydney. I would like to share this with you.

Notes from the 2nd New Investigator Symposium special guest lecture:

‘How to write a paper and get it published in a good medical journal’- a talk from

The Executive Editor of The Lancet, Dr Stuart Spencer (with permission).

Title: Should begin with a keyword from the main theme of the paper. Try to keep it short and simple. Avoid abbreviations.

Abstract: Structure a short (~250 words) abstract. Most people end at the abstract so it is important to spend time on this.

Introduction: Start with what is already known. Identify what is unknown? Why was the study conducted in the first place? What is the question (hypothesis) being tested?

Do Not- include textbook material; review the entire field of research or give away the results.

End the introduction with a clear statement of the primary research question- for e.g., “We aimed to assess the benefit of…[intervention] on [outcome] in…[setting]”.

Important questions to be answered are- Is the study reproducible based on the details provided? Are the study measurements in the logical order? Are new techniques explained in detail, with the rationale?

**Results:** Must be enthusiastic, and sound. Provide numbers and variability.

*Do Not*- exaggerate, duplicate text, figures and tables.

**Discussion:** Begin by stating what the answer was, to the question previously stated in the Introduction.

1st Paragraph: What did this study show?

2nd Paragraph: Strengths and weaknesses of the methods.

3rd Paragraph: Discuss as to how the results support or refute the current knowledge

Final Paragraph: Provide insight on Future directions ‘so what?’ & ‘where next?’. What is the impact on current thinking or practice?

**References:** Journal specific formatting is crucial; else, the editor will sense the previous submission (and the outcome). Carefully select the authors used and chose seminal references. Cite 1 or 2 references for each point being made.

*Do Not*- over self-cite.

**Figures & Tables:** ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’. Emphasize on the trends, patterns and relationships. Predict future values. Figure must illustrate the data too complex for a table representation. Use discretion.

**Covering Letter:** Address the Editor by Name. State the importance of the question. State the importance of the findings. Justify as to why this specific journal was chosen?

*Remember:* Editors want to publish papers, but must maintain standards. Our job is to persuade the editors that the paper is worthy. Be humble (as it is sensed in the paper)!

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