Publishing your residency project

As you make the transition from a pharmacy residency program to full-fledged practice, one way to contribute to the profession is through publishing. Why publish? To contribute to the overall body of literature on which we base our practice.

One objective of an ASHP-accredited residency is to design, implement, and present a practice-related project. A further requirement is to prepare a final report of this project in manuscript style. Even if you are just beginning your project, it is not too early to start planning the process of publication. And if you are in the middle of collecting data, putting the finishing touches on your final presentation, or starting your postresidency position, it is not too late to get your project manuscript ready for publication.

To publish or not to publish? Sit down with your project mentor(s) and evaluate the significance of your project. Ask these questions:

1. Would the project add something different or unique to the body of literature? During your project research you will read articles from various journals and publications, so you will know what has already been published. Would the publication of your project provide new information or a different perspective?
2. How could this project be used in practice?

On the basis of your experience thus far (and that of your mentors) and your review of the literature, think about what is current standard practice. Is your project a process that others could implement to improve their practices? Does it provide new information that affects clinical decision-making? Do you think your project could or should influence others to change what they are now doing?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then your project may have a good chance of being published. An example of a publishable residency project is a report on the implementation of a new or novel process or protocol, accompanied by postintervention data. Such a project provides a model for other institutions to follow or provides preliminary data to fuel future studies.

However, your publication quest is not necessarily over if the answer to any of the above questions is no. This is often the case with institution-specific retrospective medication-use evaluations that involve no actual intervention. This type of project may reveal data that are interesting but not generalizable outside the institution. It may be more appropriate to submit such a project to a local pharmacy organization or institutional newsletter or present it as a poster. Taking the project a step further by performing an intervention and collecting more data would add to its value. If time is an issue, the ongoing project could be passed on to the next resident, and you could still collaborate on publication.

Present a poster. A good step on the way to publication is presenting your work at a meeting poster session. Submitting a poster forces you to meet a deadline (the abstract submission), organize data into graphs and tables, and decide how you want to present your work. You gain experience in formatting material for formal presentation and in summarizing your project orally for those who stop by your poster. You are likely to receive constructive feedback from peers and colleagues and may get some fresh ideas or new perspectives.

The meeting poster session can also be a good opportunity to network with others who have interest or experience in similar work. It is beneficial for you, as a new practitioner, to find out what kind of work your peers are doing.

Where to publish? If you and your mentors decide the project is publishable, the next step is to choose the right journal. First, identify your target audience: What type of practitioners will benefit most from this information? Keep in mind that you may want to reach non-pharmacy practitioners as well as phar-
macists. Second, find journals that match your target audience. Review the author guidelines (these can usually be found on a link from the home page of the journal’s website), and decide which article category best fits your manuscript (e.g., original research report, case report, review, drug information summary). Choose one journal, and plan to submit only to that journal. It is unacceptable to submit to multiple journals at once to enhance the likelihood of publication. It is often helpful to contact the editors of the journal to which you wish to submit. Tell them about your project, provide a timeline for submitting it, and ask if they would be interested in reviewing it for publication. When you have made a decision about where to publish, write up your project as a manuscript that conforms to the journal’s guidelines. Read the guidelines carefully, and conform to all requirements regarding a cover letter or title page as well as the manuscript’s structure, subheadings, word length, font size, spacing, margins, file type, and formatting for references, tables, and figures.

Who should be an author? As soon as you have decided to submit the manuscript for publication, determine who should be listed as authors and in what order. If you, the new practitioner, have the primary responsibilities for writing, formatting, editing, and submitting the manuscript, you will be the first author listed. It is customary to list coauthors in the order of their contribution to the manuscript; however, not everyone who is away from the manuscript, the more interest in and motivation for the project will fade. Waiting too long may actually increase your workload; you may need to perform new literature searches, collect new data, or add sections to your manuscript. If you choose to “let it be” for a while, define a short, firm “time-off” period, and then adhere to that deadline for coming back to the project.

Feedback before publishing. Feel free to have a colleague not involved with the manuscript read it and comment. Many of your residency preceptors and colleagues review articles for pharmacy and medical journals, and asking them to review your manuscript is a great way to get objective feedback. It may also be helpful to ask someone with expertise in English grammar, writing, or editing to review the manuscript before submission.

Even if you have left your residency site, you must involve your project mentors and coauthors in the entire publication process. As coauthors, they have not only the right but the responsibility to review and approve the final manuscript.

Accepted, but . . . . Manuscripts accepted for publication almost always require some revision. If yours is accepted, you will receive from the reviewers a list of questions, comments, suggested revisions, and often a timeline for resubmission. Difficult as it may be, try to take these comments as constructive. This is the peer-review process at work. Journal editors and reviewers are tasked with ensuring that what is published is clear, accurate, and relevant to practice. Remember, their job is to make your manuscript better.

Do not respond to the comments after first reading. Take some time to review them thoughtfully after your emotional response has passed. Respond politely and completely to each comment from each reviewer. Use wording such as “thank you for this observation” or “the authors agree this point could be better clarified,” and describe how you have revised the manuscript or simply answer the reviewer’s question. If, after careful thought, you still disagree with a comment made by a reviewer, you may “respectfully disagree” and use evidence to state why. An article published in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology provides good suggestions for responding to reviewers.

When submitting your revised manuscript, pay close attention to detail and carefully follow the editors’ instructions for resubmission. If you will be unable to comply with the editors’ requested timeline for resubmission, it is best to notify the editors as soon as possible.

If at first you don’t succeed . . . . If your manuscript is not accepted by the first journal, do not give up. Your work may still be worthy of publication in a different journal or for a different audience. Look honestly at the reviewers’ comments and feedback, and use them to strengthen the manuscript. If you are struggling to find another appropriate journal, some journal editors are willing to point you toward a more suitable journal. If you do choose a different journal, make sure to reformat the manuscript according to that journal’s guidelines.

Just do it. Now that you have some guidelines for getting started, do it! If you have a project that you believe would benefit other practitioners in their practice, you should share it. Start by writing down your thoughts. You can deal with formatting later. As a new practitioner with a project, there is no better time for you to get experience in publishing. Use this opportunity to guide your future publishing endeavors.


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