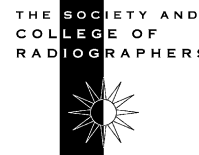


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## EDITORIAL

## Writing for publication

Radiographers work in an environment that is driven, increasingly, by the need to evaluate practice and to economise. This is a familiar aspect of modern life for many of us no matter what we do for a living; but therein lays a particular problem for a profession. For a group to be truly considered a profession it has to carve out for itself a distinct and unique body of knowledge that is dynamic and forward-looking; one that enables the group to self-regulate the quality of its practice. Professions are able to do this by communicating to practitioners, new findings from their peers through a variety of channels in the expectation that findings are valid and testable. One of the traditional channels for this important activity is the written publication, and it is through this that we share best practice and promote newly discovered efficiencies.

Research (and we use the term in its broadest sense here) is often carried out for reasons of personal and institutional ambition; but we should not lose sight of the fact that it is also performed for the greater good. It is this feature of research that carries a (moral) requirement for publication. In the excellent "The Ethics of Belief"<sup>1</sup> the scientist and mathematician William Clifford (1845–1879) wrote, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" and in this world of evidence-based practice in healthcare we do well to consider his sentiment. The practice of modern medicine operates in a setting that bases its activities on research findings. Sharing new knowledge gained through rigorous testing and evaluation allows professional practice to develop on solid foundations of demonstrated truth. So we encourage practitioners and academics to submit their work to this journal so that the science and art of medical imaging and radiotherapy/oncology can progress in a way that is open and clear.

But quality is the key. Journals must be sure that the work they publish is scientifically sound, is communicated in a clear and scholarly way and that the authors are accountable for their claims. Knowledge new to science becomes valid only when it is subject to testing, and peer-review carried out by journals in their editorial process ensures that this scrutiny is applied to all material submitted for publication. Even so, the process is not fool-proof, as evidenced recently by the exposure of the fabricated results from stem cell and cloning research in

South Korea published in *Nature*.<sup>2</sup> But this event emphasises to all scientific journals the importance of vigilance and rigour in the editorial and reviewing process.

For *Radiography* the issue of quality in its publications has particular resonance. As well as the normal demands of academic rigour and scientific integrity, this Journal has to demonstrate that these qualities are ever-present whilst at the same time recognising the emergent nature of the discipline. Radiography practitioners do not have a long tradition of research in their profession on which to draw for encouragement and inspiration when they consider writing for publication. This makes the step into submitting their work for peer scrutiny rather more daunting than normal and perhaps the fear of rejection is a little more acute than for those in long-established research professions. So radiographers may need a greater degree of encouragement, support and guidance in the process of writing for their fellow professionals than is the case for some other disciplines. One feature of highly esteemed scientific journals is that the rejection-rate of submissions is around 50%. Another 30% are rejected but invited to re-submit after modification and about 20% are accepted with minor revision.<sup>3</sup> This emphasises the rigour of the review process, but it is instructive to note the reasons why a journal decides to reject a submission. Generally, there are three main reasons: (1) the material is inappropriate for the journal, (2) the work is fundamentally flawed or (3) the work is unintelligible.

Perhaps these facts can help put the balance between quality and encouragement into perspective for the individual author. But they also indicate the need for practical support in the writing process especially for newcomers to the task. This Journal can help in publishing tutorial and review articles in the skills of writing for science but the main source of this support must come from the universities, and those experienced in writing. Universities are sources of education in radiography but they are also the place where research is part of everyday life. The skills of writing for research and scholarship are exactly that. Skills. And skills can be learnt best from those who use them most. Part of the job of an academic is to research and publish so we make the appeal through these columns for universities to make their expertise available to practitioners who wish to develop their writing abilities.

As you might already know, this journal has put in place an extensive writer support network, and support extends around the globe. Our Editors, Editorial Board and referees strive to help established and novice writers improve their work prior to publication. Our referees often provide extensive and helpful comments on how an article can be improved during the revision process. Our Editors and other members of our Editorial Board provide additional support as required – face to face, through email or via the telephone. Additionally, around the UK, Writer Support Workshops have been hosted by *Radiography* in collaboration with *Synergy* (professional magazine published by the Society and College of Radiographers) in order to bring the importance of writing to the forefront of radiographer's minds. Universities too are starting to play their part in the process of helping people write for publication.

It is known that one UK University holds a full day workshop on scientific writing for third year undergraduate radiographers. This day focuses on the process of article submission and revision as well as 'how' to write scientific articles. This workshop forms part of the student support for an assignment, in which students are expected to write (but *not* submit to a journal) a review article. This assignment contributes to degree classification. It is interesting to note that some marks within this assignment are attributed to the details surrounding article submission. This represents unambiguous evidence that [UK] universities have made a good start in practically supporting novice writers within our profession. However, whilst some universities have engaged in similar activities not all have yet. Nonetheless as the evidence-based professional culture develops further we are confident that all university-based schools

of radiography will further embed research, formal scientific writing skills and the need for radiographers to further develop their published knowledge base within their undergraduate curricula/formative professional education. As such we anticipate that the radiographer's need to generate new professional knowledge will grow, as will their desire to publish their findings.

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