



## Editorial

# So Why Haven't I Seen That Manuscript?

Very often, when I visit psychiatric units or hospitals or attend conferences or conventions, I hear nurses describing wonderful new clinical approaches or strategies, telling about new management systems they have designed, expressing interesting ideas and questions, or just venting their frustrations. When I say, "So why haven't I seen that manuscript?," the responses are varied. Some nurses look quite surprised; they had never thought of themselves as authors. Some are pleased to be taken seriously and to have someone listen attentively. Some look worried, fearing that some unpleasant work may lie ahead.

I have puzzled over why it is that so much good clinical practice is not shared in print with others. At conventions and conferences, where talking is the mode, the sharing seems to happen relatively easily. My favorite hypothesis is that nurses are reluctant writers because they have had adverse, unpleasant experiences with writing. It feels like school, like rigid rules, like authorities or teachers criticizing one's work.

Perhaps I am puzzled because I have always had pleasant experiences with writing. When I was in

grade school, my fourth-grade teacher, Miss Drysdale, told me I wrote well and asked me if I would like to join the staff of the school newspaper, *The Broadcaster*. Those positions usually were reserved for children in the upper grades, so I was delighted to be invited. When I reached the eighth grade, I became the Editor and decided to add a new column. Our school mascot was Squiffer E. Squirrel; his initials were the same as those of the school, the Samuel E. Schull School. I decided to ghostwrite columns for Squiffer. It was great fun. Sometimes he shared secrets he had overheard in the teachers' coffee room. Other times he congratulated students for doing well in sports or some special event. Sometimes he just wrote about life as a squirrel, when all the students and teachers left for the day. In retrospect, I consider this experience excellent training for the future times when I became a ghostwriter for Deans, as they prepared grants.

My other pleasant experiences with writing were when Hilda Peplau became my teacher and provided thorough, detailed, patient feedback when I turned in papers. She often wrote longer notes than the initial one-page or two-page

paper assignment. Writing became a wonderful dialogue with a master teacher, who gave me her undivided, respectful attention.

Another hypothesis I have about why more nurses do not write for publication is because they think the only work that gets published is full-length, scholarly articles. This is not the case. The *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* is interested also in short manuscripts about new clinical approaches which have not yet been tested by a rigorous, clinical trial method, or new approaches to organizing departments, developing programs, or motivating staff. First-person accounts about solving dilemmas are welcome. Thoughtful opinion pieces about change that is needed will be considered. Offers to become media reviewers are always appreciated. Other writing possibilities include specialty organization newsletters, which welcome articles about regional news, continuing education events, or the personal experiences of members.

The barriers to writing for publication which sometimes are shared with me include:

- Not having enough time because of family and work demands.



- Not having a dedicated “writing space” at home or work.
- Being unsure of where and how to begin.
- A general sense of not wanting to fail.

All of these barriers can be overcome. I enjoy doing workshops for nurses on writing for publication. At the very top of the agenda for the session are strategies and techniques about how to address and overcome these barriers.

I have a folder with notes about the conversations I have had with potential authors, and from time to time I call them and give them a gentle “nudge.” This editorial is a

general “nudge” to all those nurses whose ideas should see the light of day in print. In my folder there is a potential article based on notes that a nurse on an inpatient adolescent unit has kept over the years about her young patients who have been discharged and continue to return for informal visits to the staff. There is another about a simulation/game developed to sensitize staff about the dilemmas faced by discharged patients who have too few or inappropriate community resources. A recent possible article is about a “damp house,” an alternative treatment approach in which patients who abuse alcohol and/or drugs are

not required to be abstinent but to control their use (hence “damp,” not “dry”).

I have another budding hypothesis. I am wondering whether or not the increase in the use of e-mail will work positively to produce more manuscripts. Has that been the case for you? What do you think? Put your thoughts in writing.

---

Shirley A. Smoyak, RN, PhD, FAAN  
Editor