

Publishing your articles in the Pharmaceutical Journal of Kenya: notes from a career seminar at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

Mugo M.

The editorial board of the Pharmaceutical Journal of Kenya (PJK) delivered a career seminar on 1st November 2019 at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Juja, Kenya. The main goal of the seminar, as highlighted in the news at that time (here: <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001348322/jkuat-pharmacy-students-tipped-on-journal-publishing> and here: <http://www.jkuat.ac.ke/pharmacy-students-tipped-on-journal-publishing-skills/>) was to create awareness among students and faculty about the journal publishing process in general and publishing in the PJK in particular. This narrative article seeks to highlight key points from the seminar and share additional thoughts on the topic.

Before going into details, it is important to mention that the board was highly encouraged and impressed by the meticulous organization of the JKUAT event and the huge turn out by students and faculty of the school of pharmacy, led by the Dean, Dr. Alex Mureithi. Faculty members present reiterated the need for students to be attuned to the process of publishing, urging them to take up the challenge. Students showed great interest in the publishing process, with one asking whether authors outside Kenya were welcome to submit manuscripts to the PJK.

Benefits of publishing in a scientific journal

The digital revolution has made it possible for anyone with internet access to share their thoughts, knowledge, and talents with the world. This has led to questions about the benefits of giving one's work to a second party for publication (preparation and issuing to the public). Indeed, a trend is emerging where individual writers produce and publish their own work directly through various digital platforms. For example, for book writers keen on earning income from their publishing efforts, Kindle Direct Publishing is an excellent option, a platform on which publishing takes less than five minutes and the book appears on Kindle stores worldwide within 24-48 hours, earning the writer 70% royalty on sales [1, 2]. For professional non-book material, LinkedIn is a good outlet [3]. With regard to scientific writing, "pre-print" servers are a great way for researchers to quickly post their findings and obtain feedback from other scholars in their field, thus circumventing protracted journal peer review requirements [4]; pre-print is in quotes because the process nowadays involves no printing.

Still, in this evolving context, publishing in a peer-reviewed

scientific journal has a number of distinct benefits over self-publishing. As the name suggests, the peer review process is perhaps the most prominent benefit. Peer review is a form of self-regulation in which one or more people with similar competences as the author (peers) evaluate a manuscript for validity, scientific rigor, and adherence to ethical principles [5]. Most traditional journals, PJK included, use a pre-publication review approach where the peer review process precedes publication. While most self-publishing approaches feature some post-publication review elements of varying degrees of thoroughness and structure, commentary and revised versions of the work tend, in the long run, to get lost or confused. Pre-publication review not only helps to improve the paper but also ensures that only one validated copy of the work is available to the public. This is beneficial to the individual author and to the whole scientific community as it streamlines the knowledge synthesis process. In an attempt to preserve the benefits of peer review while ensuring prompt publication, emerging open-peer-review journals, such as Wellcome Open, provide a more structured post-publication review platform [6].

Coming specifically to the PJK, publishing may be an effective way for authors to contribute to shaping healthcare in Kenya and beyond. It is noteworthy that the PJK is accessible globally as it is available through the Pharmaceutical Society of Kenya (PSK) website and will soon be indexed in Google Scholar®. On top of this altruistic impact, publishing could enhance the professional development efforts of authors as each published paper earns the author a good number of CPD points and publication record may be a criterion for funding and job promotion. Further, many professionals consider it prestigious "to be published", hence publishing may enhance professional reputation. The PJK, being a publication targeting like-minded individuals, is also an arena for networking.

Scope and editorial principles of the PJK

The PJK publishes original research manuscripts, reviews, letters to the editor, and short communications. It covers all aspects of medicines, health and life sciences. PJK welcomes submissions from all practitioners, researchers, academics, students, and industrialists wishing to share their ideas, knowledge, information and research findings with stakeholders in the health sector and the public at large.

There is no requirement for one to be a pharmacist or a member of PSK.

The PJK accepts only original articles submitted exclusively to the journal; prior and duplicate publications are not accepted. However, publication of an abstract under conference proceedings is not be considered as prior publication. All previous work must be properly referenced. Human and animal studies must have received ethical approval.

Publishing in the PJK is free. The author passes copyright to the journal and authorizes the journal to share the work under the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license, which means others can reuse the work as long as they credit the author (BY), use it for non-commercial purposes only (NC), and create no derivatives (ND) [7]. Prior consent from co-authors of a manuscript must have been sought and agreement reached before submission.

Manuscript submission and review process

PJK publishes 2-4 issues per year and accepts submission on a rolling basis. Submissions can be made on the journal homepage (<https://www.psk.or.ke/journals/>) or emailed to the editorial office (pjk@psk.or.ke).

Article lengths vary depending on article type: original research manuscripts, reviews, and study protocols may be up to 3,500 words; while short articles, such as case studies, letters to the editor, and other short communications may be up to 1,500 words.

Submitted manuscripts are initially checked by the editorial board. At this stage, manuscripts may be returned to the author for revision, before peer review, if the manuscript does not comply with Editorial policies or the format is clearly non-compliant with journal guidelines. Thereafter, manuscripts are sent out for blinded peer review (i.e., the author will not know who the reviewer is), usually to two independent reviewers. In special circumstances, authors may be asked to suggest reviewers, but the final choice of reviewers is a preserve of the Editorial Board.

For minor revisions, the authors are encouraged to resubmit within 7 days, while for major revisions, this may be up to 14 days. Upon resubmission, the Editorial Board may choose to send the paper back to the reviewers, or may render a decision based on their expertise.

Guidelines on content and style of articles

For full length articles, the overall goal of content and style guidelines is to enable readers to determine what was planned, what was done, what was found, and what the findings mean; hence PJK supports the common outline for scientific papers: **Title, abstract, introduction, objectives, methods, results, discussion, and references**. For short articles, there are no specific guidelines except the word limit; however, authors are encouraged to scan through previous issues of the journal to get a feel of the prevailing style and format.

Title, abstract, and key words. The title, abstract, and key words are the most critical parts of the journal article because this is what the majority of readers and electronic search engines will go through. Authors are advised to pay special attention to these sections and ensure they are a succinct summary of the paper. This is especially important given that PJK is largely an online journal and appropriate title, abstract, and key words have been shown to facilitate search engine optimization, and subsequently ensure that articles are found (crawled), indexed, and ranked high by search engines [8]. The abstract usually should not contain any abbreviations. Being a summary of the main article, the abstract is ideally written last.

Titles can either be declarative or descriptive. Declarative titles focus on the findings (what was found) and or the implications of the findings (what the findings mean), while descriptive titles focus on the methods (what was done) and or the objectives (why it was done). For a hypothetical study, an example of the former would be "High level of interest in publishing among students and faculty in Kenyan universities: a qualitative assessment", and for the latter, this would turn into "A qualitative assessment of interest in publishing among students and faculty in Kenyan universities".

Introduction and objectives: The aim of the introduction section is to put the study in context, including a review of pertinent literature and statements about the identified gaps in knowledge. The objectives, which can sometimes be embedded in the introduction, are thence concise statements about the purpose of the study. In other words, the introduction and objectives section seeks to answer the question: "Why was the current study necessary?"

Methods: The methods section presents the design and procedures employed to address the research objectives, in sufficient detail that another investigator could follow to reproduce the experiments. Common sub-sections here include: study settings (where and when the study took place), sampling procedure, data collection procedures (including ethical considerations and protocol approval details), and the statistical analysis approach.

Results: This section presents findings from the data analysis in a logical and coherent order, ideally mirroring the order in which the data was collected. The authors should provide sufficient interpretation of data, but leaving detailed reflection and comparisons for the discussion. Where tables and figures are used, accompanying text should be complementary and not a repetitive narration of all the information.

Discussion: In an editorial published in the British Medical Journal around the turn of the millennium, Docherty and Smith, addressing the problem of speculation ("going beyond the data"), made a case for structuring the discussion section in scientific papers [9], proposing that it should start with a statement of principal findings, followed by the strengths and weaknesses of the study (linking back to but not repeating the introduction), then the strengths and

weaknesses in relation to other studies (and discussing in particular any differences in results), meaning of the findings (in terms of possible mechanisms and implications for clinicians and policymakers) – taking care not to go beyond the data, and finally any questions that remain unanswered and the research proposed to address them in the future. This editorial was followed in short order by a rebuttal of sorts, in a review paper published in the same journal by Skelton and Edwards, who argued that “discussion sections already have a fairly conventionalized structure; that some speculative language in the discussion section is desirable; and that, even if speculative language were not desirable, it would be impossible to get rid of it by virtue of a tighter structure” ([10], Figure 1).



Figure 1. Demonstrating, albeit on a light note, the need to speculate in the discussion section of scientific papers. Copied from Skelton and Edwards 2000 [10].

Clearly, there is no consensus regarding the structure of the discussion section, and The PJK does not prescribe any. However, it is reassuring that, despite Skelton and Edwards' contention, the findings of their review was that the common structuring of discussion sections mirrored the proposals by Docherty and Smith. Personally, I have found the guidelines by Docherty and Smith extremely useful, if not to dogmatically adhere to the proposed structure, in helping to begin to think about what to include in the discussion. I must admit that this was never clear to me before reading that guideline article, despite having read hundreds, if not thousands, of other scientific papers!

Conclusion

I hope these notes are helpful for those intending to publish in the PJK or any other scientific journal. The slides from the

seminar can be found here: <https://www.slideshare.net/PMwangiMugo/publishing-in-the-pharmaceutical-journal-of-kenya>; I welcome readers to share their opinions and thoughts on this topic in the comments section.

Bibliography

1. Kindle Direct Publishing. https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/ Updated, Date Accessed: 24 May 2020.
2. Top 10 Self-Publishing Companies: A 2018 Guide for First-Time Authors. <https://info.editage.com/book-editing-services/articles/top-10-self-publishing-companies-a-2018-guide-for-first-time-authors.html> Updated, Date Accessed: 24 May 2020.
3. Publish Articles on LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/47538/publish-articles-on-linkedin?lang=en> Updated, Date Accessed: 25 May 2020.
4. What are preprint servers and what is their role in scholarly publishing? https://www.letpub.com/author_education_What_are_preprint_servers_and_what_is_their_role_in_scholarly_publishing Updated, Date Accessed: 25 May 2020.
5. Kelly J, Sadeghieh T, Adeli K. Peer review in scientific publications: benefits, critiques, & a survival guide. *EJIFCC* 2014;25(3):227.
6. Wellcome Open Research. How it works. <https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/about> Updated, Date Accessed: 25 May 2020.
7. Creative Commons. What our licenses do. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/> Updated, Date Accessed: 25 May 2020.
8. Academic Search Engine Optimization: ASEO. <https://openjournalssystem.com/academic-search-engine-optimization/> Updated, Date Accessed: 25 May 2020.
9. Docherty M, Smith R. The case for structuring the discussion of scientific papers: Much the same as that for structuring abstracts. *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 1999;318(7193):1224.
10. Skelton JR, Edwards SJ. The function of the discussion section in academic medical writing. *BMJ* 2000;320(7244):1269-70.

The author is a researcher at the KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Pharmaceutical Journal of Kenya*. Email: mugo247@gmail.com