



EDITORIAL

Clarity, completeness, accuracy: three essential elements of good research reporting

Findings from the nursing research represent an important part of the overall evidence that informs public health policy decisions and everyday clinical practice. The number of published papers in all areas of nursing research is growing fast. It is therefore important to remind ourselves that only research that is well designed, well conducted, and finally well reported in a scientific journal can have the desired impact and be fully utilised further.

Unfortunately, the quality of many published papers often substantially decreases the value of the presented studies. Common problems include unclear or incomplete description of research methods and interventions, selective reporting of only some outcomes (often driven by achieved results), insufficient reporting of adverse events, inadequate statistical reporting, misleading presentation of a study in the abstract, or general misinterpretation of study findings. Additional problems are created by the failure to publish whole studies, or by publishing them after a long delay. Evidence strongly shows that studies with statistically significant (“positive”) results are published more often and earlier than studies with non-significant (“negative”) results. All these problems distort scientific literature and make research reports either completely unavailable or unusable.

Several international initiatives are trying to improve the overall transparency of conducted research. For example, all clinical trials should be prospectively registered before they start recruiting participants and almost all journals publishing trials require proof of registration with one of the approved registers (<http://www.who.int/ictpr/en/>). Registration of systematic reviews has also been recently encouraged by creating a dedicated register (<http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/>).

Another initiative, the EQUATOR Network, is helping to increase the quality of health research publications by promoting the use of reporting guidelines. Reporting guidelines, which specify the minimum information that needs to be included in reports of different types of research studies, are useful tools for increasing completeness and transparency of research papers. The EQUATOR Library for Health Research Reporting (freely available at <http://www.equator-network.org>) provides access to a large number of reporting guidelines. Examples of the internationally accepted guidelines include CONSORT for reporting randomized controlled trials, STROBE for observational studies, and PRISMA for systematic reviews. These guidelines are useful, if not essential, tools for preparing first class research manuscripts. They can also help peer reviewers to assess the completeness of research reporting. EQUATOR works with journals to maximise the use of reporting guidelines and an increasing number of journals now requests compliance with relevant guidelines.

Every well conducted research study, regardless of where in the world it is published, counts towards the global body of evidence and extends our knowledge further. We encourage contributors to our journal to learn about the basic principles of rigorous research reporting from resources such as the EQUATOR website, ideally before they start planning their new research project. Following relevant reporting guidelines can greatly improve the quality of your manuscript. We believe that your research papers, proudly published our journal, will then be highly appreciated by the scientific community for their clarity, completeness, and accuracy of the presented findings.

Iveta Simera

*Member, International Editorial Board
EQUATOR Network, Centre for Statistics in Medicine,
University of Oxford, Oxford, UK*