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Publishing Prevention Science: Challenges for Early Career Researchers and Practitioners. An EUSPR-Pre Conference Workshop

Dr Kimberley Hill

Background

Prevention science is a multi-disciplinary field concerned with evidence-based approaches and policy implications that have an impact on health prevention and promotion (Sloboda & Petras, 2014). Despite being a very young field, prevention scientists have contributed to the development of an innovative knowledge base and continue to have a profound impact on public health. Prevention work is important, as there is an increasing need for evidence-based prevention approaches to address determinants of ill-health and health inequalities through universal, selective and indicated prevention (EUSPR, 2013).

Advancing prevention science and practice is an international endeavour and one that requires ongoing and active collaboration between both researchers and practitioners (Botvin, 2004). The European Society for Prevention Research (EUSPR) is a scientific society which aims to promote the work of inter-disciplinary prevention scientists, practitioners and policy-makers. The society provides a platform for those working in a range of disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, medicine and epidemiology to come together to network and share ideas, high quality research and methodological developments.

EUSPR activities, including the Annual International Conference and Members Meeting, provide attendees with opportunities for education and development in areas related to prevention science. Many of these developments are led by individuals who are in the early stages of their career, or those who have limited experience in disseminating and publishing research. It is important that this valuable work is also shared, as it strengthens the existing research base and provides an insight into areas of pressing public health concern. As this prevention work remains crucial to the development of the field, it is important that early career researchers receive support and guidance in sharing their research with others.

This year, the EUSPR established the first European and inter-disciplinary platform for early-career researchers, practitioners and policy-makers interested in prevention research. The current article reviews one of these workshops, which was developed to provide both guidance and feedback to early career researchers, practitioners and policy-makers who are currently preparing a manuscript for publication in the field of prevention science.

Workshop

This pre-conference workshop on *Writing Papers for Publication and Publishing Papers* was held in October 2015 prior to the EUSPR's 6th Annual International Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The workshop attracted early career researchers and practitioners with a range of research interests and from a number of countries, and was aimed at those with limited experience of publishing in peer-reviewed journals.

An early networking opportunity identified that many workshop attendees were working in applied areas and developing, testing or implementing novel prevention approaches. For example, papers submitted for the workshop focused on: governance in UK healthcare, Cambodian community health workers, Swedish parenting programmes, Tanzanian females' HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, tobacco cessation programmes, Brazilian drug abuse prevention programmes, motivational interventions, promoting physical activity, complementary and alternative medicine in Italy, and Gaelic athletes' experiences of sports-related concussion.

The morning session of the workshop featured a presentation by Dr Kimberley Hill on the importance of publishing for early career researchers and practitioners involved in prevention science. It was identified that there remains a crucial need for prevention research, particularly in tackling public health challenges and informing both practice and policy. Delegates agreed that publishing their research was not just important for their own career prospects and future development opportunities, but also in sharing their expert knowledge and setting the foundations for future prevention research.

Following this initial session, invited keynote Professor Michal Miovský gave a presentation on publishing preventive science. As an experienced researcher and member of a number of editorial boards, Professor Miovský provided a valuable insight into his own experiences publishing addiction research. As the Vice President of the International Society of Addiction Journal Editors (ISAJE), Professor Miovský was able to use a range of educational and training publication-related activities formulated by ISAJE (Babor, Stenius, Savva & O'Reilly, 2011). This included advice on developing first drafts of scientific papers; good practice for ethics, research methods and language; issues surrounding authorship and how to choose a journal; the use and abuse of citations; responding to referees and reviewing manuscripts Professor Miovský also addressed issues surrounding 'predatory' open access journals (see: Shen, & Björk, 2015).

Delegates then completed a brainstorming activity on the challenges faced when going through the publication process. Concerns included whether to choose a journal for impact factor or research speciality; limited knowledge of the peer review process and how long it would take to publish. Many spoke of the difficulties faced when having to make changes to their work as suggested by editors; how to format papers correctly and issues when working with co-authors. Delegates felt they mostly needed help in citing previous research, particularly systematic reviews; reporting statistical tests and effect sizes; proof reading articles before submission; communicating with editors and selecting peer reviewers.

Following a discussion of these issues, an expert panel of senior researchers were then invited to give their experiences of publishing papers and respond to brainstorming challenges. Advice from Professor David Foxcroft, Professor Rosaria Galanti, Dr Amadore Calafat and Professor Miovský, included contacting journal editors during the publication process, not aiming to write the perfect paper and asking others to review articles before submission. It was suggested that writers use papers from the preferred journal as a guide

when structuring their paper and focus on the quality of publications instead of quantity. Other tips from the expert panel included aiming for clarity when telling the research story and be explicit about the importance and impact of the paper.

Prior to the workshop, each delegate submitted a draft paper or extended abstract that they intended to publish. Delegates were then asked to read and review three other articles within their allocated group, using feedback provided by the workshop facilitator. During this session of the workshop, delegates in each group discussed their papers in a structured format. Writers introduced their paper, identified the focus, methods, questions and challenges. Group members then discussed the paper and provided feedback using a set of pre-specified questions. Members of the senior research panel were available to provide further guidance. The workshop ended with feedback to the plenary on common themes that had arisen throughout the day, followed by closing remarks from the workshop facilitator.

Feedback

Feedback from the workshop was particularly positive. Despite many aspects of the workshop being new to attendees, all of the delegates felt that the knowledge and information gained would be directly applicable to their work. Delegates felt that being with other early career researchers and practitioners provided a safe environment to give and receive feedback, while allowing them to see that others shared similar concerns.

Delegates found the insight into publication provided by panel members most interesting, particularly the tips on how to cope with paper rejection. The brainstorming activity was also popular and viewed as a good tool for identifying publication challenges. In particular, the feedback received on individual draft papers was viewed by delegates as most useful for future work. Delegates particularly enjoyed reading and critiquing other articles, as this made it easier for them to see what constituted a good article. This section of the workshop was popular, as many attendees stayed after the workshop to continue with their discussions.

While attendees found the peer feedback constructive, some would have valued more detailed feedback on manuscripts by the expert panel. In addition to this, delegates would have preferred to see other examples of published papers and to have more time to discuss their own articles. Despite this, delegates viewed the workshop as a valuable exercise and suggested that similar intensive sessions should take place in the future.

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