

# Writing for professional publication.

## Part 9: using client case studies

John Fowler



### Abstract

The previous articles in this series of writing for professional publication focused on the preparation you need to do before starting to write an article, the practicalities of writing the abstract, creating interest in the reader's mind, and how an article for publication differs from an academic essay. Recently we considered the importance of selecting the correct journal for submission. In this article, John Fowler, an experienced nursing lecturer and author, discusses how client case studies can be used within your article.

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I suppose I must have worked with and taught thousands of nurses over the years, and one thing that I feel that is common to all of them, is that they are genuinely interested in people's lives. As a lecturer I try to use this interest that nurses have in people to structure all sorts of lessons, including physiology, leadership and even research. Harnessing and capturing that interest and curiosity we all have in people can be achieved using client case studies, which are essentially 'true stories' drawn from real practice. Once you are genuinely interested in what you are reading you will learn from it, and it will excite you and motivate you to take what you are learning forward into action. That is why case studies are so important in professional publications.

### How can case studies be used?

Case studies tell a story in order to illustrate a point or help us to understand a situation by viewing it in a real-life context. There are a

variety of ways that client case studies can be used in professional publications:

- As a snapshot of a specific time period in a client's treatment, e.g. postoperative care for the first 24 hours, or the initial consultation of a community psychiatric nurse
- As an overview of the client's interaction with the health service throughout the duration of their specific medical condition, e.g. a 20-year overview of a person with bipolar mood fluctuations or diabetes
- As an insert within a physiologically based article to illustrate pathophysiology, e.g. in an article on heart failure you may include a case study of how Mr Smith presented with an acute episode to an out-of-hours centre
- As a way of communicating the holistic nature of the predisposing factors or the effect on the clients lifestyle, e.g. exploring the psychosocial factors relating to asthma
- To evaluate the quality of care delivered by your unit by critical reflection of a client's journey through the system.

This list could on, but I hope you begin to realize the potential use that client case studies can have in communicating important aspects of nursing.

Client case studies also give you the opportunity to include a number of

interesting additions to the written word, such as photographs of equipment or wounds, tables and graphs, and possibly brief statements from the clients themselves, their relatives, or from other members of the healthcare team involved in the care of the client, e.g. physiotherapist, medical doctor, specialist nurse, community nurse. This is very useful and can add an important multidisciplinary team perspective.

I am confident that whoever you are, you are in an excellent position to write a client-centred case study. You could be a student nurse, a staff nurse, a clinical nurse specialist, or maybe you are a client or carer yourself. It is so easy to divorce physiology, pharmacology, sociology and other important bodies of knowledge from their application to client care. Client case studies are about integrating the underpinning knowledge and evidence base into the practice of client care. Senior practitioners will use a more specialized literature evidence base within the case study, and probably pose more questions to debate, while student nurses will probably use well-established textbooks and general guidelines. But each case study will use the lived experience of a real person as scaffolding on which to build their article. That structure of a real person's experience will enable you as the author to communicate important facts, discussion points, innovative practice, good practice and holistic care to other nurses in a language that they can easily relate to.

The final and most important point relating to the use of client case studies is client confidentiality. When describing the treatment of an actual person, it is of course essential to preserve their anonymity and obtain consent to publish any photographs. It may also be necessary to gain your employers' permission to publish the case study.

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Dr John Fowler wrote his first article for publication as a staff nurse 30 years ago. Since then he has published over 50 articles in a variety of publications and edited seven nursing text books. He has supported over 40 nurses in writing for publication.

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