

Fostering a Publication Culture: Supporting Students and Early Career Researchers in Nursing and Midwifery

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Academic publishing remains a daunting prospect for many in the nursing and midwifery professions, particularly students, early career researchers and practitioners. Yet the ability to articulate ideas, share innovations, and contribute to the profession's knowledge base through publication represents far more than a credential-building exercise—it constitutes a fundamental aspect of our professional identity and responsibility. This editorial argues for reconceptualising publication as an integral component of nursing and midwifery leadership and calls upon established academics to actively mentor those beginning their publication journey.

Publishing as Professional Identity Formation

When we encourage nurses at all career stages to publish, we are not merely asking them to add a line to their CV. Rather, we are inviting them into a professional conversation that has been ongoing for generations—a conversation that our colleagues in medicine, psychology, and allied health professions have long recognised as fundamental to their professional identity. Each publication represents a voice in this conversation—a contribution to how we understand nursing and midwifery practice, education, innovation, and research. As such, publication becomes an act of professional citizenship.

The relationship between evidence-based practice and publication is symbiotic. We expect nurses at all levels to engage with evidence, yet this ecosystem can only thrive when new voices continually contribute to it. For all nurses—not just researchers—

seeing one's ideas, quality improvement initiatives, practice innovations, or clinical insights published creates a powerful sense of belonging to a scholarly community. This sense of belonging shapes professional identity in profound ways and places nursing and midwifery on equal footing with other healthcare disciplines where publication is viewed as an expected professional activity rather than an optional academic pursuit.

The journey toward publication also reveals much about ourselves—our motivations, the impact we hope to have, the key messages we wish to communicate, and the audiences we seek to reach. Clarifying these elements not only provides direction but establishes purpose beyond the publication itself, transforming practice experiences into lasting contributions to nursing and midwifery knowledge.

Publication as an Act of Leadership

Too often, we frame publication as an outcome of formal research rather than an act of leadership itself. This perspective requires revision. When nurses publish—whether they are sharing research findings, quality improvement outcomes, innovative practice approaches, opinion pieces or clinical insights—they extend their influence beyond immediate practice settings or educational institutions. Ideas committed to paper (or digital platforms) travel farther than we can physically reach, creating ripples of influence that may continue long after we have moved on.

Publishing builds networks and connections that transcend geographical and institutional boundaries. These networks represent more than career advancement opportunities; they constitute communities of practice that nurture innovation and improvement. For nurses at all career stages and in all roles—clinical practice, education, management, or research—these connections often prove invaluable for professional development and future collaborations.

The motivation that drives us to publish should focus on purposeful contribution and meaningful engagement rather than merely fulfilling institutional expectations. When framed this way, publication becomes less about "having to" and more about "wanting to"—a subtle but crucial distinction in sustaining engagement with writing. This positive motivation stems from understanding the value our practice experiences and innovations offer to colleagues across the profession, and recognising that sharing knowledge is a fundamental aspect of nursing and midwifery leadership.

A Call to Action for Established Academics

If publication represents a conversation, then established academics have a responsibility to ensure new voices can participate effectively. This responsibility extends beyond occasional supervision or review; it requires active mentorship and support.

We must create environments where early publication attempts are celebrated rather than scrutinised. This means establishing structured mentorship programmes that pair experienced publishers with novices; creating writing groups that normalise the challenges of writing and provide accountability; offering co-authorship opportunities that scaffold the publication experience; and providing constructive feedback focused on development rather than deficiency.

The benefit flows in both directions. Mentoring early career researchers often reinvigorates the mentor's own writing practice and introduces fresh perspectives. It creates publication communities that can counteract the isolation often associated with academic writing.

Reflections from Early Career Researchers

RO - As an early-career researcher, embracing writing opportunities and immersing oneself in an environment where publication is a fundamental practice helps normalise publishing and demystify the misconception of it being a purely academic engagement. From leading journal clubs that spark robust dialogue among diverse healthcare professions, to engaging in established research programs that provide a strong foundation, each step brings us closer to initiating and contributing to broader, more impactful conversations. By publishing our insights, opinions, and expertise, we not only advance the profession's body of knowledge but also actively shape patient care and, most importantly, reflect our ever-evolving health and care landscape. Every submission, irrespective of the format chosen, can drive innovation, strengthen evidence-based practice, and elevate collective standards. Ultimately, rising to the challenge calls us to make informed decisions that bring about meaningful, lasting change.

KB- I published my first article in Nurse Education Today and feel honoured, 6 years later, to have been a guest Editor for this student special edition. I have found the process of writing a manuscript, the outward facing product of research processes, enhanced my critical thinking and refined my research understandings. But as first author it takes determination, time, and resilience in navigating the seemingly abstract processes of peer review. I have been supported by mentors through my career, and they have helped me navigate these processes and help me find my scholarly voice in my writings. Similarly, the feedback from NET reviewers serves as a form of mentorship, they offer their expertise, provide nuanced advice about methods and suggest ways to enhance the manuscript. Their guidance and dedication strengthen the manuscript's argument and clarity, ensuring it reaches its full potential. The reviewer's time is a gift to the nursing and midwifery community in advancing research excellence.

My congratulations to all student or early career researchers who are published in this special edition, you have contributed to scholarly discourse and made meaningful

impacts to nursing and midwifery. I hope that the publication opportunity in Nurse Education Today strengthens your career, fosters collaborations, sparks transformative changes and inspires critical thought within our professions.

Addressing Emotional Barriers to Writing

The barriers to publication are well-documented and often emotional in nature. Common thoughts include "I don't have anything valuable to share," "I don't have time to write," "I'm worried my work will be criticised or rejected," and "I don't feel confident in my writing abilities." These concerns create psychological obstacles that often prove more challenging than the actual writing process itself.

These emotional barriers affect how we approach writing. When we feel anxious about our writing, our stress response activates, making creative thinking and productive writing difficult. Conversely, when we feel supported and confident, we can access a more creative, connected state of mind that facilitates clearer thinking and writing. Understanding these emotional responses helps us create conditions that support rather than hinder our writing efforts.

Time constraints represent a legitimate concern for nurses in all roles. However, understanding one's writing preferences can help overcome this barrier. Do you work best in short, frequent sessions throughout the week, or do you prefer dedicated blocks of time for focused writing? Do you find energy in collaborative writing environments or need quiet solitude to produce your best work? Recognising these preferences allows for more effective integration of writing into existing work patterns.

The fear of criticism or rejection requires particular attention. By reframing peer review as an opportunity for development rather than critique, we can shift our emotional response to feedback. Engaging in informal peer review before submission—through writing buddies, mentors, or target audience members—can build confidence and improve the quality of submissions. This preparation also helps pre-empt formal reviewers' comments by addressing common concerns in advance.

Practical Frameworks for Getting Started

For those beginning their publication journey, clarity of purpose provides essential direction. Consider your motivation: What drives you to share this particular knowledge or perspective? Your desired impact: What change do you hope to effect through this publication? Your key message: What is the essential point readers should take away? Your target audience: Who needs this information most?

These considerations should inform the type of publication pursued. Whilst peer-reviewed journals offer academic credibility and international reach, practice-based journals may have greater influence on clinical applications. Social media and other

platforms provide accessibility and rapid dissemination. Each serves different purposes and reaches different audiences.

It's important to recognise that valuable contributions to nursing and midwifery knowledge come in many forms. Quality improvement projects, clinical innovations, new educational approaches, service evaluations, and practice developments all merit publication—not just traditional research. Nurses who develop new care pathways, implement evidence-based practices, or transform services have experiences worth sharing that can benefit colleagues worldwide.

Planning provides structure to intention. Define a working title that encapsulates your central theme; a target publication venue appropriate to your content and audience; dedicated writing times that honour your preferred approach; and a writing buddy or mentor who can provide support and accountability. Starting with smaller publications or co-authored pieces can build confidence before tackling more substantial works independently.

Conclusion

Publication in nursing and midwifery should not be viewed as an optional academic exercise but as a professional responsibility that shapes both the individual and the profession—just as it is in medicine, psychology, and other healthcare disciplines. By reconceptualising publication as an integral aspect of professional identity and leadership for all nurses, we can motivate practitioners in all settings to contribute their unique perspectives to our collective knowledge.

The call to established academics and experienced authors is clear: create pathways, provide support, and actively mentor nurses at all levels who wish to share their work. In doing so, we ensure the vitality and relevance of nursing and midwifery scholarship for years to come, elevating nursing and midwifery's voice in healthcare discourse to equal that of other professions.

The journey toward publication is as valuable as the publication itself. By demystifying the process and providing supportive structures, we can transform publication from an intimidating prospect to an engaging and rewarding aspect of professional life. This is particularly important for those engaged in quality improvement and innovation work, whose contributions often remain hidden within local settings when they could benefit the wider profession.

The conversation awaits new voices—not just from research but from all areas of nursing and midwifery practice, education, and leadership. Let us ensure they are heard.