Introduction

• There is growing interest in the publication of plain language versions of scientific publications, with Plain Language Summaries (PLS) or Plain Language Summaries of Publications (PLSPs) helping in communicating research to non-expert audiences.
• Recent research has also highlighted the important role of PLS in empowering patients and fostering the dialogue between patients and their physicians.
• Recent work has shown that 45% of patients and caregivers access journal articles.
• There are several ways in which PLS of clinical trial data are published.

Results

• Following review of the ICMJE guidelines, we considered PLSPs to be an Acceptable Secondary Publication, provided several conditions were met as outlined in Table 1.
• A PLSP should ideally include at least one author from the original publication and include all pertinent information of the original article, and the PLSP is preferred.
• Our first peer-reviewed standalone PLSP was published open access in Future Oncology® and is discoverable through PubMed, where it links to the primary research publication.

Table 1. Conditions stipulated by the International Committee of Medical Journals Editors’ recommendations on Acceptable Secondary Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The authors have received approval from the editors of both journals (the editor concerned with secondary publication must have access to the primary version).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The priority of the primary publication is respected by a publication interval negotiated by both editors with the authors.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The paper for secondary publication is intended for a different group of readers; an abbreviated version could be sufficient.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The secondary version faithfully reflects the authors, data, and interpretations of the primary version.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The secondary version informs readers, peers, and documenting agencies that the paper has been published in whole or in part elsewhere—for example, with a note that read, “This article is based on a study first reported in [journal title, with full reference]—and the secondary version cites the primary reference.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The title of the secondary publication should indicate that it is a secondary publication (complete or abridged replication or translation) of a primary publication. Of note, the NLM does not consider translations to be “republications” and does not cite or index them when the original article was published in a journal that is indexed in MEDLINE.</td>
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Conclusion

• Our experience has confirmed that it is possible to publish a PLSP as a standalone, peer-reviewed article, with the benefits conferred in terms of quality and discoverability.
• Further work is required to ensure the language used in the PLSP is at an appropriate literacy level, where currently no formal guidance exists.
• Further action with bodies such as journal indexing sites and patient organisations could help improve article discoverability.
• As the publication practice of PLSP evolves, we plan to adapt our publication process, ensuring any emerging guidelines or standards are followed and incorporated where relevant.

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Disclosure


References


Plain Language Summaries of Publications as standalone journal articles: a publisher’s case study

Joanne Walker & Laura Dormer

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Figure 1. How to publish a Plain Language Summary of Publication in a Future Science Group journal.