Author attitudes to professional medical writing support

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Abstract

Objective

The aim of this survey was to examine author attitudes towards professional medical writing support (PMW) by exploring their experience of working with PMWs, believing that PMWs should be acknowledged for their work, and the value they attach to the assistance of PMWs. The study was complementary to our previous survey of authors with no experience of medical writing support.

Introduction

The changing professional environment should see a shift in non-industry supported publication and the role of PMWs, as they can add to reporting standards and compliance with good publication practice.

Research design and methods

Survey population

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by an individual to authors contacted between April and June 2012. Of the authors contacted, 29.2% (76/260) responded to the survey. Personalized invitations to participate in the survey were sent by an individual author or researcher.

Survey questionnaire

Survey questions (Table 1) were developed in consultation with and were pre-tested by sample authors. The survey included open questions to capture other aspects of the writers' experience with PMWs and acknowledge that PMW services may be available in different forms.

Results

Acceptance and acknowledgement of PMWs

A total of 76 (76/70, 108.6%) respondents felt that it was acceptable to receive assistance from PMWs, and 87.1% (61/70) respondents believed that PMWs should be acknowledged for their work. The majority of authors (71.0%; 54/76) of respondents felt that it was acceptable to receive assistance from PMWs, and 69.7% (53/76) of respondents believed that PMWs should be acknowledged for their work.

Experience of working with PMWs

Most respondents had at least some experience of working with PMWs (100% (76/76)). In general, authors reported a positive, valuable experience (87.1%; 61/70) with PMWs, and 71.0% (54/76) of respondents felt that it was acceptable to receive assistance from PMWs.

Value attached to the assistance of PMWs

The majority of authors (69.7%; 53/76) of respondents believed that PMWs should be acknowledged for their work. In general, authors reported a positive, valuable experience (87.1%; 61/70) with PMWs, and 71.0% (54/76) of respondents felt that it was acceptable to receive assistance from PMWs.

Open question

Authors' perceptions of the value that professional medical writers (PMWs) can add to the preparation of publications: (a) overall value added* and (b) value added to specific areas.

Limitations

Although academic/clinician authors accept the use of PMWs, misunderstandings continue to persist, in particular with respect to the role of PMWs in research. The predominant role of PMWs in research is to add to reporting standards and compliance with good publication practice. In general, most respondents (71.0%; 54/76) of respondents felt that it was acceptable to receive assistance from PMWs, and 69.7% (53/76) of respondents believed that PMWs should be acknowledged for their work.

Conclusions

There was internal inconsistency in some of the responses, as some authors’ comments revealed a misunderstanding of the role and value of PMWs. This study is limited by the number of respondents who stated they had no experience with PMWs still commented on direct contact with PMWs. It would be interesting to compare the findings of this study with a similar survey of authors with no experience of medical writing support.

Implications

Although academic/clinician authors accept the use of PMWs, misunderstandings persist about the role of PMWs and the value they can add to medical writing. The education of authors in the scientific/technical assistance and expert guidance on authorship – for example, conformity with manuscript guidelines (e.g. CONSORT) – is essential for the full range of services that PMWs can offer.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by Caudex Medical. We would also like to thank those who took the time to complete our survey. The authors would like to thank Stephen Craig PhD of Caudex Medical for his expert guidance on authorship.

Disclosures

All authors are employees of Caudex Medical.

References

Caudex Medical

2013 European Meeting of ISMPP; London, UK | 22–23 January 2013

FIGURE 1. Author experience with professional medical writers (PMWs) in general, not associated with any publication (‘experience questions’).

FIGURE 2. Author perceptions of the role of professional medical writers (PMWs) in the preparation of scientific/technical assistance and expert guidance on authorship – for example, conformity with manuscript guidelines (e.g. CONSORT).

FIGURE 3. Author perceptions of the role of professional medical writers (PMWs) in the preparation of scientific/technical assistance and expert guidance on authorship – for example, conformity with manuscript guidelines (e.g. CONSORT).

FIGURE 4. Author perceptions of the role of professional medical writers (PMWs) in the preparation of scientific/technical assistance and expert guidance on authorship – for example, conformity with manuscript guidelines (e.g. CONSORT).