Objective: To understand the factors associated with variability in manuscript development time across multiple client accounts and therapy areas.

Methods: Program Management was asked to provide the following data for manuscripts submitted from August 2011 through August 2013: therapeutic area, client account, manuscript type (primary, secondary, review), number of internal and external authors, initiation date and date of first submission. Time from initiation to first submission (month) was evaluated using descriptive statistics and ANOVA.

Results: After eliminating incomplete records, we obtained records for 175 manuscripts—99 primary, 39 secondary and 37 reviews—from 26 product teams spanning 10 major therapy areas. ANOVA demonstrated significant variation (P<0.001) across accounts, therapy areas, article types and author numbers. Time from initiation to submission ranged from 1–121 months (median; 10 months, mode 3 months). Development time for primary manuscripts was significantly faster than for reviews by 2.6 months, (P<0.05) and for secondary publications by 3.3 months, (P<0.01). Outliers on development time were mostly linked to requirements for additional data analyses. Therapy area and the ratio of internal to external authors were also associated with variations in development times. Primary and secondary development times were consistent across major accounts, with one outlier that may be related to client procedures.

Conclusions: There was significant variability in manuscript development time that was largely a function of article type, with primary manuscripts having the shortest and secondary manuscripts the longest development times.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

• There is considerable variability in manuscript development time within and across product teams, ranging from 2–31 months.
• Manuscript type (primary, secondary, review) appears to be the most important, but not the only, determinant of lead time.
• Therapeutic area and the balance of internal versus external authors, but not total number of authors, also emerged as potentially relevant sources of variability.
• Reasons for delayed manuscript development given by team leads were varied and did not include the quantitative factors we examined.