HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Am J Nurs. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2025 January 01.

Published in final edited form as:

Am J Nurs. 2024 July 01; 124(7): 36–39. doi:10.1097/01.NAJ.0001025644.87717.4c.

Methods to Disseminate Research: A Primer

Bernadette Capili, PhD, NP-C [Director],
Heilbrunn Family Center for Research Nursing, Rockefeller University, New York City

Joyce K. Anastasi, PhD, DrNP, FAAN
Independence Foundation Professor of Nursing and founding director of Special Studies in Symptom Management, New York University, New York City

Decisions in healthcare, policy, education and other fields use data to drive action and change (Ruiz et al., 2022). Hence, communicating research findings is essential to ensure knowledge acquired can assist with advancing a field, changing practice and policy, or learning from the challenges and barriers encountered during the study. In addition, disseminating research results allows other research professionals, stakeholders, and the public to benefit from the knowledge generated from the study. Therefore, information obtained from research must be communicated beyond the walls of the investigators' laboratory or institution. This paper provides an introduction to disseminating/communicating research findings to other research professionals, clinicians, policymakers, and funders/sponsors.

Why must we disseminate research findings?

As discussed in previous *Research Step-by-Step* columns, conducting research is challenging. It takes a great deal of hard work and effort. Yet, research findings can influence policy and practice positively, but only if the results reach a broad audience. Hence, widely disseminating findings can significantly increase the impact of the research (Grant, 2012). For example, clinicians can utilize the findings and insights to improve patient outcomes, such as incorporating foot inspections for HIV patients with peripheral neuropathy. Foot inspections are generally associated with patients with diabetes and not HIV, yet a clinical exam and patient education about foot care can prevent future health issues. In addition, funders/sponsors will recognize that the resources allocated for the study were meaningful, allowing others to learn and benefit from the research. Furthermore, some research findings could assist policymakers in developing better services and building stronger communities. Finally, other investigators can learn from the research outcome and potentially focus on further developing the science.

Pre-Research Planning

Before the research project begins, the strategy for dissemination should be considered (McGrath, 2016). Developing an effective plan to disseminate the results is essential and will give funders/sponsors confidence in their research investment. In addition, some research

bcapili@rockefeller.edu .

funders/sponsors require research they sponsor to make results available to the public (i.e., open-access publication – the process of allowing published articles free of charge and available online) (McGrath, 2016). For example, studies funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) must comply with the public access policy for publications. Therefore, the National Library of Medicine provides a PMCID (PubMed Central Compliance Identification number) which indicates that the author(s) complied with the open access policy(NIH, 2015).

Things to Consider for Dissemination

It is essential to identify your target audience(s) and determine the best methods to reach them (Ross-Hellauer et al., 2020). The audience can include patients, clinicians, professional organizations, policymakers, or anyone who may benefit from the research. Furthermore, it is essential to gain insight into what motivates the audience(s) and potential barriers they may face regarding receiving information about the research. For example, does the target audience have access to the internet if the dissemination plan primarily includes circulating results on websites? Therefore, understand where and how the audience(s) search for such information to ensure the research findings connect with the right people (NIHR, 2019). Lastly, communicate the research findings to the study participants. The study participants may be interested in assisting with sharing the results with others and can be strong advocates for the study findings.

Questions to Consider for Dissemination

1. Is the research team looking to raise awareness and understanding or alter how people think and act? (i.e., raise awareness about heart health and physical activity)
2. How will the research team measure the progress and determine if the efforts have made a meaningful impact? (i.e., how many people attended the conference lecture or how many people downloaded the published article)
3. How will the research team ensure that the goals are achievable? (i.e., adequate budget for open-access publication, team member(s) with social media skills) (NIHR, 2019)

Considerations for Dissemination: Team Experience and Stakeholders

A question to consider is when is the optimal time to start to share research findings? Strategically, plan the timeline to account for external factors and utilize existing opportunities, such as upcoming conferences or journals with a themed issue related to the study (NIHR, 2019). Additionally, consider encouraging participation from members of professional organizations (i.e., *Oncology Nursing Society*, *Association for Nurses in AIDS Care*) or networks that might have an interest in the research. Additionally, consider the skillset of the research team and decide if additional assistance is needed with dissemination. For example, the dissemination plan may benefit from the involvement of individuals from an institution's communications department or public relations office.

Investigators and/or team members usually have content expertise (i.e., diabetes, hypertension) in their area of research. In addition, they may know key people in the community or groups who can help guide the study team in sharing the study findings. Therefore, it is essential to include such stakeholders early on to ensure that the data produced and collected is relevant, accessible, helpful, and practical for the target audience(s) (NIHR, 2019). For instance, contact a local or national organization that focuses on the area of research (i.e., *Rheumatoid Arthritis Foundation*, *American Diabetes Foundation*) and seek their guidance and input about the study design and outcome. In addition, review the terminology that will be used to reach the target audience(s). The research team should inquire if the language is clear and appropriate for the intended audience.

Furthermore, these stakeholders may understand how the research findings can influence the target audience(s)' daily routines or clinical practice. Additionally, ask if they can assist in disseminating the research results to their organization. Finally, it is essential to emphasize that some organizations may require a fee to access their membership and need a copy of the research protocol and institutional review board approvals.

Where to Communicate Research Findings

To communicate the information to the intended audience, use various methods, including journals, conferences, social media platforms, websites, and traditional media outlets. Additionally, build relationships with influencers (i.e., active members of a professional organization – such as the conference planning committee members; clinicians with a large following on social media) within that target demographic who can help promote the findings. Dissemination/communication will require effort and planning; however, many methods can be achieved without additional expenses or minimal cost, from publishing reports to a website and social media platforms. Furthermore, with current technology, investigators can communicate research findings to a broad audience.

Journal Publication

Publishing research studies in peer-reviewed journals is generally always on an investigative team's dissemination plan because journal publications are the primary method by which other investigators can read others' research. So, first, select a journal that best fits the topic area (Henly, 2013) and, ideally, publish with journals indexed in databases such as *PubMed* for health-related topics, *Sociological Abstracts* for sociology, *ERIC* for education, and *Psychinfo* for psychology (McGrath, 2016). These databases catalog journal articles, which libraries and investigators use to search for and obtain new information. Publishing in such journals will help increase the visibility of the research. Additionally, if a journal is not well-indexed but is still the best fit for the study, check that it is included in *Google Scholar*, where other researchers can find it (Devitt, 2016). Please see the weblink to learn how to add manuscripts to *Google Scholar* https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/inclusion.html#overview.

Some journals are only open-access, or some have a hybrid option that allows the author(s) to select if they want an open-access article or traditional access, wherein only journal subscribers or those who pay can read their work. Regardless of the type of journal selected (open-access only or hybrid), open-access articles are easily accessed and read for free without needing a subscription to the journal. However, journals generally charge the author(s) a fee for making articles open-access. Before paying the fees, check with the publisher if discounts or waivers are available (McGrath, 2016). Additionally, individuals working at universities or academic medical centers should check with their libraries or research support office if their institution has an institutional discount. Please see the weblink for the *Directory of Open-Access Journals* http://doaj.org to search for open-access journals and articles.

Caution: Predatory Journals

In the past few years, scholarly publications have changed with the availability of open-access journals. Digitalization enabled publishers to experiment with new ways, such as hosting content online and open-access publishing which was virtually unheard of before (Shamseer et al., 2017). But unfortunately, this also opened up a world for predatory publishers who exploit unsuspecting author(s) looking for outlets to publish their work.

For example, their article publication charges (APC) can be lower than traditional open-access journals, and they often do not make them known before submissions occur (Shamseer et al., 2017). This allows such journals to gain an economic advantage over legitimate publishers. Furthermore, they often charge author(s) for publication without performing the scholarly peer review necessary to assess for quality (Shamseer et al., 2017). Predatory journals may also not provide specific publishing services such as licensing, indexing, and content preservation, which legitimate, open access journal offers (Shamseer et al., 2017). Inviting authors to submit manuscripts via email can be appealing, especially for inexperienced or early-career investigators who need a publication record to advance their careers. Such invitations often tout the advantages of open access and rapid peer review, complimenting potential authors as experts or opinion leaders (Shamseer et al., 2017).

Conference Presentation

Presenting research findings at conferences and seminars can effectively share research with others in one's field. In addition, presentations can increase the visibility of research by offering an opportunity to gain feedback from peers and experts on research topics. Conferences also allow networking opportunities that can help spread the word about one's research or even lead to future collaborations with other researchers in the field (McGrath, 2016). In addition, consider posting the presentation on a free hosting service, like *Slide Share* (www.slideshare.net), where others can find and comment on the work using a web search engine. As an additional pointer, some funders/sponsors allow the cost of travel to conferences to disseminate the findings. Again, review the requirements of the funding mechanism to know the allowable and unallowable expenses for the research budget.

Social Media

Social media outlets like *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* can also provide ways for researchers to disseminate their findings quickly and widely among audiences outside academia and within it (Verhagen, Bower, & Khan, 2014). For example, investigators can use *Facebook* to post publication links on their pages where friends and colleagues can see them. For *LinkedIn*, investigators can join specialty groups and post questions and their research to selected groups. *Twitter* also allows users to connect directly with special interest groups who could potentially share the results from their study; this could reach wider audiences than traditional academic outlets, like journals, which would generally go through their subscription model restrictions. A paper by Terras (Terras, 2012) wrote about her experience using *Twitter* to promote her open-access articles. She learned that seven papers she wrote were the top ten most downloaded from her department. For *YouTube*, create short movie clips. Usually, videos over four minutes receive fewer views than shorter ones (McGrath, 2016). Develop clips that provide insight into the research findings and use creative and engaging clips to maximize viewer interest. Social media presence could also draw the attention of other professionals who may already be interested in particular areas, leading to further collaborations or job opportunities related to those fields of study.

Additionally, to track the impact of the research posted on social media, *Altmetrics* (www.altmetric.com) is a subscription-based service used by some publishers and universities (McGrath, 2016). The service can show how often scholarly work has been mentioned on *Wikipedia* and *Twitter*. However, individual subscriptions are not available at this time. Please see Table 1 for Instructional Links to Join Social Media Groups

Press Releases and Websites

Press releases are an excellent method to share research with a diverse audience. A research press release concisely summarizes the study targeted for public release (NIHR, 2017). As a result, many people learn about health-related findings from press releases. In addition, it can provide crucial information to decision-makers, clinicians, and other investigators. Connect with your institution's public relations and communications department to get more information and assistance in developing press releases. Review the web link from the *National Institute of Health Research* from the United Kingdom for additional pointers. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/press-releases-as-a-way-to-disseminate-research-results/12304

Another venue to disseminate research is your institution's website. For example, many universities have individual web profiles for their faculty, highlighting education, experience, teaching, research, and publications. In addition, most medical centers and universities have web links promoting their departments (i.e., endocrinology, women's health) or research laboratories, which describe the members and services of the department or laboratory. Then, with the appropriate approvals from administrators/managers, request to post an attention-grabbing headline and summary about the research. Finally, include a link to find the published article.

Summary

In conclusion, there are different methods investigators can use to disseminate their work beyond publishing articles in journals and presenting at conferences. These include using social media outlets such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* as platforms for communication and discussion among peers within academia and reaching broader audiences outside academia who otherwise may never have come across one's work. In addition, investigators must stay abreast of current trends to disseminate their work, reach the appropriate audience, and positively impact the lives of many.

Acknowledgments

This manuscript is supported in part by grant # UL1TR001866 from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program.

References

Devitt P (2016). How to use social media to disseminate research findings. Nurs Child Young People, 28(8), 20. doi:10.7748/ncyp.28.8.20.s25

Grant MJ (2012). Disseminate your findings. Health Information & Libraries Journal, 29(1), 1–2. doi:10.1111/j.1471-1842.2012.00978.x [PubMed: 22335284]

Henly S (2013). Finding the Right Journal to Disseminate Your Research. Nursing Research, 63(6), 387. Retrieved from https://wkauthorservices.editage.com/resources/author-resource-review/2016/June-2016.html

McGrath B (2016). A Guide to Ensuring Wide Dissemination and Lasting Impact for Your Research. Retrieved from https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Research-Dissemination-Guide.pdf

NIH, National Institutes of Health (2015). PMID vs PMCID: What's the Difference? : Nexus News Letter Retrieved from https://nexus.od.nih.gov/all/2015/08/31/pmid-vs-pmcid-whats-the-difference/

NIHR, National Institutes of Health Care Research (2017). Press Release as a Way to Disseminate Research Results. Retrieved from https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/press-releases-as-a-way-to-disseminate-research-results/12304

NIHR, National Institutes of Health Care Research (2019). How to Disseminate Your Research. Retrieved from https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/how-to-disseminate-your-research/19951

Ross-Hellauer T, Tennant JP, Banelytė V, Gorogh E, Luzi D, Kraker P, … Vignoli M (2020). Ten simple rules for innovative dissemination of research. PLoS computational biology, 16(4), e1007704. doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1007704 [PubMed: 32298255]

Ruiz R, Schwartz A, Orlando E, Ossip D, Zand MS, & Dozier A (2022). Moving beyond annual data reports: A blueprint for communicating and disseminating actionable intelligence. J Clin Transl Sci, 6(1), e70. doi:10.1017/cts.2022.399 [PubMed: 35836791]

Shamseer L, Moher D, Maduekwe O, Turner L, Barbour V, Burch R, … Shea BJ (2017). Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison. BMC Medicine, 15(1), 28. doi:10.1186/s12916-017-0785-9 [PubMed: 28298236]

Terras M (2012). The Impact of Social Media on the Dissemination of Research: Results of an Experiment. Journal of Digital Humanities, 1(3 Summer). Retrieved from https://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-3/the-impact-of-social-media-on-the-dissemination-of-research-by-melissa-terras/

Verhagen E, Bower C, & Khan KM (2014). How *BJSM* embraces the power of social media to disseminate research. British Journal of Sports Medicine, 48(8), 680. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2013-092780 [PubMed: 24065077]

Table 1.

Instructional Links to Join Social Media Groups

Instructional Links to Join Social Media Groups	
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/help/ipad-app/401492893195007
LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a544795/find-and-join-a-linkedin-group?lang=en
Twitter	https://support.twitter.com/articles/76460-using-twitter-lists#.
YouTube	https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/57407?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop