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Glasziou P, Altman DG, Bossuyt P, Boutron I, Clarke M, Julious S, Michie S, Moher D, Wager E. Reducing waste from incomplete or unusable reports of biomedical research. *Lancet*. 2014 Jan 18;383(9913):267-76. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62228-X. Epub 2014 Jan 8.

****Professional medical writers: More haste, less waste****

To paraphrase the paraphrased opening line of the much-needed paper by Glasziou et al.,^{^1} “The problem [with researchers who need, but don’t use, professional medical writing support] is long-standing, worldwide, pervasive, potentially serious, and not at all apparent to many researchers, peer-reviewers, journal editors, sponsors, and journalists.” We, the members of the Global Alliance of Publication Professionals, congratulate Glasziou and his colleagues for highlighting the need for better reporting to help reduce research waste. We are surprised, however, that the authors did not explicitly recommend the use of professional medical writers (ie, those writers who are NOT ghostwriters).^{^2-5} If researchers used professional medical writers with more haste, we believe — and evidence suggests — there would be less research waste.

We readily acknowledge that some researchers don’t necessarily require professional writers. These researchers: - Write well- Are given adequate time to write- Follow journal guidelines- Are aware of, and adhere to, best-practice reporting guidelines- Keep up-to-date on regulations affecting medical writing practices- Expertly project manage themselves and their co-authors - Ensure disclosures are complete, etc...Based on our collective experience of 100+ years of working with researchers around the world, however, not all researchers are so well-equipped. They (and the biomedical literature) could benefit greatly from the ethical, legitimate, and valuable support professional medical writers provide.^{^6} Although evidence on the use of professional medical writers is embryonic, studies have shown that ****manuscripts with professional medical writing support are more compliant with CONSORT guidelines (especially reporting of harms),^{^7} accepted more quickly for publication,^{^8} and less likely to be retracted for misconduct,^{^9**} compared with those without writing support.** A recent survey of authors also showed that 84% of authors valued the use of professional medical writers, with 1 in 3 viewing such support as ****extremely valuable**.**^{^10}The cost of providing medical writing support has been calculated and is certainly affordable.^{^6} Glasziou and his colleagues are correct that “a small proportion of core grant funding” should be dedicated to writing. Who should do this writing though...and, importantly, who has the time and expertise to do it quickly and do it well? ****A recent systematic review of 27 studies identified lack of time as the main reason researchers don’t write.^{^11**} Professional medical writers have the advantage of being able to provide focused time, in addition to being able to provide the expertise to help authors prepare timely, high-quality reports. Indeed, writers who have passed a psychometrically validated exam to become a Certified Medical Publication Professional (CMPP) have had to prove their knowledge on 150 topics related to ethical and efficient medical writing practices.^{^12} Results from the Global Publication Survey (manuscript in preparation) will also reveal the extent of knowledge and guidance that professional medical writers provide to authors. Like Glasziou et al., we support author training. We doubt, however, that every author who needs training will have the capacity, resources, or inclination to be trained. It can take years to become a great writer and it takes an increasing amount of time to keep abreast of best-practice reporting guidelines and regulations that affect writing. In the same way that professional statisticians help researchers who lack the time or expertise to analyse their data, professional medical writers can help researchers, who lack the time or expertise, to report their data. Today, biomedical research often requires a team effort and, given the need to improve results reporting, we believe (and evidence now suggests) that professional medical writers should be trusted and valued members of these teams. The time to recognise and use professional medical writers is now — those who act with haste should incur less waste.**



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Disclosures

All authors declare that: (1) all authors have or do provide ethical medical writing services to academic, biotechnology, or pharmaceutical clients; (2) KW's husband is also an employee of ProScribe – Envision Pharma Group; all other authors' spouses, partners, or children have no financial relationships that may be relevant to the submitted work; and (3) all authors are active in national and international not-for-profit associations that encourage ethical medical writing practices. No external sponsors were involved in this study and no external funding was used.

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