Developing your role with conferences and chairing meetings

Jennie Burch guides readers on how to present research at a conference as well as providing practical advice on chairing a meeting

Jennie Burch, Head of Gastrointestinal Nurse Education

jburch1@nhs.net

Reflecting on the development of the senior nurse and meeting the four pillars of advanced nursing it is important to consider not simply our clinical role but also our educational, managerial and research roles (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018). This short article will consider how to present research at a conference and how to chair a meeting.

It is important to share our learning and ideas not only within a formal education setting but also by learning from peers and colleagues. With that said, it can be difficult to know where to start writing a conference abstract.

While there's no single 'best' way to write a conference abstract, here are some strategies I use to create compelling submissions that increase your chances of poster or oral presentation acceptance.

A conference abstract is a summary of what you want to be presented, so think about what key message you want to convey in your poster. Also, consider which audience you want your poster to reach to ensure you are submitting to the correct conference. The poster may be a case study, an audit, service evaluation or research. Most conference organisers will provide instructions to follow for abstract writing as well as to use marking criteria to judge the quality of abstracts submitted. Read the instructions provided by the conference organisers and follow them to ensure you meet all the required criteria.

You are more likely to be accepted if you comply with the information requested by the conference organisers.

The instructions provided by the conference organisers for poster writing might include the structure required, such as the use of sub-headings as well as the word count and submission deadlines. For some conferences, there can be different abstract categories, to determine which abstracts are suitable for different sessions, this will be made explicit in the instructions.

Due to their short length (typically 200–500 words), abstracts must be concise. Focus on providing a clear overview of your topic, avoiding excessive detail. While content varies depending on the conference, and not all abstracts require references, you might see sections requesting:

- Title
- Author(s)
- Background – to provide context
- Purpose – what is the problem that is being addressed
- Methods (if it is research) – how the research problem was addressed
- Results – what did you find?
- Conclusions – what does this mean?
- Relevance to audience/conference.

When writing your poster or presentation abstract, allocate adequate time for the process, it often takes longer than anticipated. Break down the writing over several sessions to allow for refinement. It can be helpful to revisit your draft after a few days to edit with a fresh perspective. Allow time to thoroughly check for spelling and grammatical errors before submission. Finally, ask a colleague to review your abstract and offer constructive feedback.

When writing your abstract, aim for a concise and clear style that covers all key points within the word limit. Make it memorable and interesting, but avoid unnecessary details. Use plain English and tailor your writing to the intended audience. The results section will likely be the largest part of the abstract and should focus on the main findings of your research. Present results factually, without delving into their significance. In your conclusion, discuss the implications of your findings, compare and contrast them to previous studies, and consider what new research directions your work suggests.

When writing the poster, it is important to check the size and the orientation. Often the size is A0 and the orientation is portrait. It is common to use Microsoft Office PowerPoint but other programs are available.

Choose an appropriate page size for

the location where you'll display the poster. Use a minimum font size of 20 for easy reading at a distance. Select a background colour and text colour with high contrast for visibility. Use diagrams and tables to present information in a clear, concise way, ensuring they are large and of high quality. Keep the text brief and focused on the most important points, structuring the information for quick and easy scanning. It can be useful to ask a colleague to provide feedback and suggestions and build in time for revisions before the final printing. Include the names of all authors and contributors, adding acknowledgements for any funding or support.

Make sure to leave enough time to get the poster printed. Also, it is important to consider how you will display your poster and if the conference or you need to supply equipment to add the poster to the display boards.

Your poster should not have been presented elsewhere, although some of the related research might have been previously presented. For more information, watch the recording from Dr Gabby Thorpe available on the Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland website: *https://www.acpgbi.org. uk/resources/370/acpgbi_2018_writing_ an_abstract.*

Nurses attend many meetings, but chairing a meeting effectively requires skills that may initially feel daunting. The specific purpose of a meeting will partially dictate how it's conducted. In general, work-based meetings serve to enable interactions, disseminate information and facilitate planning.

Obvious requirements for a meeting include an agenda, to ensure all those present understand the need for the meeting. While taking and disseminating minutes is a crucial follow-up task, it's a separate consideration.

The role of the chair is to lead the meeting, working towards a set of goals set out in the agenda. The chair needs to ensure all present have the opportunity to contribute and participate, whilst ensuring that a focus is kept on meeting the objectives set out in the agenda within a specified timeframe. The chair needs to ensure adequate time is spent on each item on the agenda, to enable consideration of differing perspectives and points of view.

There are several skills required by a chair:
- Effective planner
- Good communicator – listening and encouraging respectful participation by the group
- Assertive and appreciative leader
- Ability to evaluate if agenda goals have been adequately met.

Careful meeting planning starts with defining clear objectives and a purpose. A well-planned meeting enables you to achieve specific goals, such as making decisions or delegating tasks. Discuss key decision points with the minute-taker beforehand to ensure those are accurately recorded.

The meeting agenda with timings should be distributed in advance for each agenda item. Starting the meeting on time and not running over are generally important. A meeting can commence once the core quota of attendees is present.

The first topics discussed are usually apologies from members unable to attend and a quick review of the minutes from the previous meeting, to ensure accuracy. Any action points should be added to the agenda to discuss how these were met or any future actions required. Keep these initial steps brief to maximise time for the main agenda.

For each agenda item, the chair should encourage discussion, seeking opinions and questions. After discussion, the chair should summarise key points and clearly define any resulting action items. Assign responsibility for each action and set a timeframe for completion. Using the SMART acronym (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) helps ensure action items are well-defined. Typically, meetings conclude with 'any other business' to address any urgent issues that have arisen.

An effective chair fosters balanced communication within the group. This includes managing dominant personalities – politely interrupting when necessary – and encouraging contributions from quieter members through positive questioning. The chair must quickly address any aggressive or inappropriate behaviour. Showing appreciation for members' contributions is also essential.

To build team confidence, provide opportunities for members to chair meetings. Offering constructive feedback and support will help them develop their leadership skills. **GN**

Nursing and Midwifery Council. Future nurse: standards of proficiency for registered nurses. 2018. https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/ sitedocuments/education-standards/future-nurse-proficiencies.pdf (accessed 29 April 2024)