

Medical Writing Doesn't Have to Be Complicated.



In this issue, I'll be sharing some great learnings from a workshop on health research I attended earlier this month. The two-day programming was offered by the National Center for Health Research in Washington, D.C. free of charge—thanks to grant funding from Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute ([PCORI](#)). The participants included a total of approximately 40 medical writers, journalists, researchers, and patients.

These days, you cannot pick up your tablet, newspapers, or television remote without seeing something about a new study. With so many studies out there, how can you tell which studies have good research with reliable data and which ones are not so good?

Use Common Sense Logic, Skepticism When Reading Scientific Studies



Photo courtesy of Pixabay

I found the workshop offered an excellent overview of basic biostatistics and analytical tools that prove indispensable in critiquing a study. Although I have taken a few statistics classes, I found that the course not only offered an excellent top-level review, but it also inspired me to think about studies in a different way. For example:

1) Sometimes, using common sense can help you determine whether or not a study is “good.” For example: If a head-to-head clinical trial shows that drug B was 8% more effective than drug A, how much difference will taking drug B make over drug A? Probably not very much.

2) Size matters. We often hear that a study's sample size is “too small,” but studies can also have too many participants and end up being too large. True, there are statistical calculations that help us determine when a study is too large. However, the simple self-check question as seen above in item 1 provides the added benefit of helping us gauge whether a study was too large, or as they say in statistics, “overpowered.”

3) Approach every single study you read with skepticism. While there is no such thing as a “perfect study,” expert panelists pointed out how reading a study with a doubtful eye helps readers analyze and critique data in a more balanced way. Being intentionally skeptical does sound pessimistic, but doing so plays a crucial role in decreasing the chances of the reader unintentionally overstating or embellishing the results of the study. Believe it or not, misinterpreting data happens quite frequently in reporting—and leads to misleading and misinforming in the public. Remember the now-infamous [chocolate myth\(s\)](#)?

Pharmacists Cope with Patient Death While Using Evidence to Critique Dietary Supplements

On a different note, in case you're wondering what I've been doing lately, current projects include press releases, reporting, and scientific writing for highly specialized audiences.

On the journalism front, two of my favorite pieces I've written over the last several months actually ran together in the current issue of [Drug Topics](#). One piece explores the emotional and professional impact of [pharmacists coping with patient death](#). The other article offers pharmacists (and other interested parties) helpful tips on using evidence and quality metrics to evaluate dietary supplements (i.e., herbal products, vitamins, etc.) in response to the growing consumer demand for these products and the [booming nutraceuticals industry](#).

So... what's next?

Right now, I will continue working on more scientific writing along with some journalism. I am hoping to attend a medication safety symposium next month. I'll be sure to share some key findings in my next newsletter. In the meantime, stay tuned!



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