Current and future publication practices: a survey of attendees at ISMPP 2010

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Abstract

Objective

To canvass information and opinion from medical publication professionals regarding current and future publication practices. This information is essential in guiding planning and future communication initiatives.

Research design and methods

The 10-question survey was administered at ISMPP 2010. Registered individuals unable to attend were emailed the survey subsequently.

Result

There were 63 respondents: 39.7% pharmaceutical companies; 25.4% medical communications agencies; 9.5% publishers. 80% of all respondents (96% of pharma respondents) reported that GPP-2 was already or was being incorporated into their publications policy. There was no clear consensus on measuring publication planning effectiveness (n=39): 36% use acceptance rates; 28% use publication timelines and 18% use publication numbers. In the future, 45.2% and 41.3% of respondents expect a decline in industry-sponsored supplements and reviews, respectively, with 16.1% and 11.1% suggesting these will become non-existent. Additionally, 41.3% expect independent statistical analysis to become standard for industry-sponsored publications.

Conclusion

This survey provides a snapshot of current publication practices and future expectations. While the sample is small and restricted to individuals at the forefront of publication ethics, the rapid uptake of GPP-2 is reassuring. Overall, the sample predicts a decline in industry-sponsored reviews and supplements; this view is not echoed by the subset of publishers completing the survey, nor those to whom we have spoken separately. Ongoing discussion will be necessary to develop consensus on appropriate publication planning metrics.

Introduction

Over the past several years, "good publication practices" surrounding pharmaceutical industry-sponsored clinical research have steadily evolved in the direction of a recognized standard (ICMJE Uniform Requirements¹, GPP-2²). However, questions remain as to whether those standards have been uniformly taken up by the industry, and where the industry sees itself headed. This survey asked a sampling of attendees at the 6th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) about the implementation of a few key GPP-2 recommendations, and assessed their opinions on the future of the industry in some controversial areas.

Methods

The 10-question survey was administered from Watermeadow Medical's exhibit booth at the 6th Annual Meeting of ISMPP in Arlington, VA from April 19–21, 2010. An electronic version of the survey was developed in Survey Monkey, enabling it to be completed quickly and easily on a laptop computer at the booth. A paper version of the survey was also available for respondents who preferred that format. Sixty-three ISMPP attendees ultimately completed the survey; as an incentive to do so, respondents

were encouraged to leave their business cards to be entered into a prize draw held on the final day of the meeting, and most – but not all – survey respondents did so. The most interesting survey results are reported and discussed here.

Results

Survey respondents

◆ Respondents were asked to select their field of employment from a provided list; the distribution is shown in Table 1. The sample was slightly weighted towards pharmaceutical company employees vs. those from medical communications agencies, which is to be expected for a survey administered in the exhibit area. Respondents identifying themselves as "other" included device company employees and freelance medical writers.

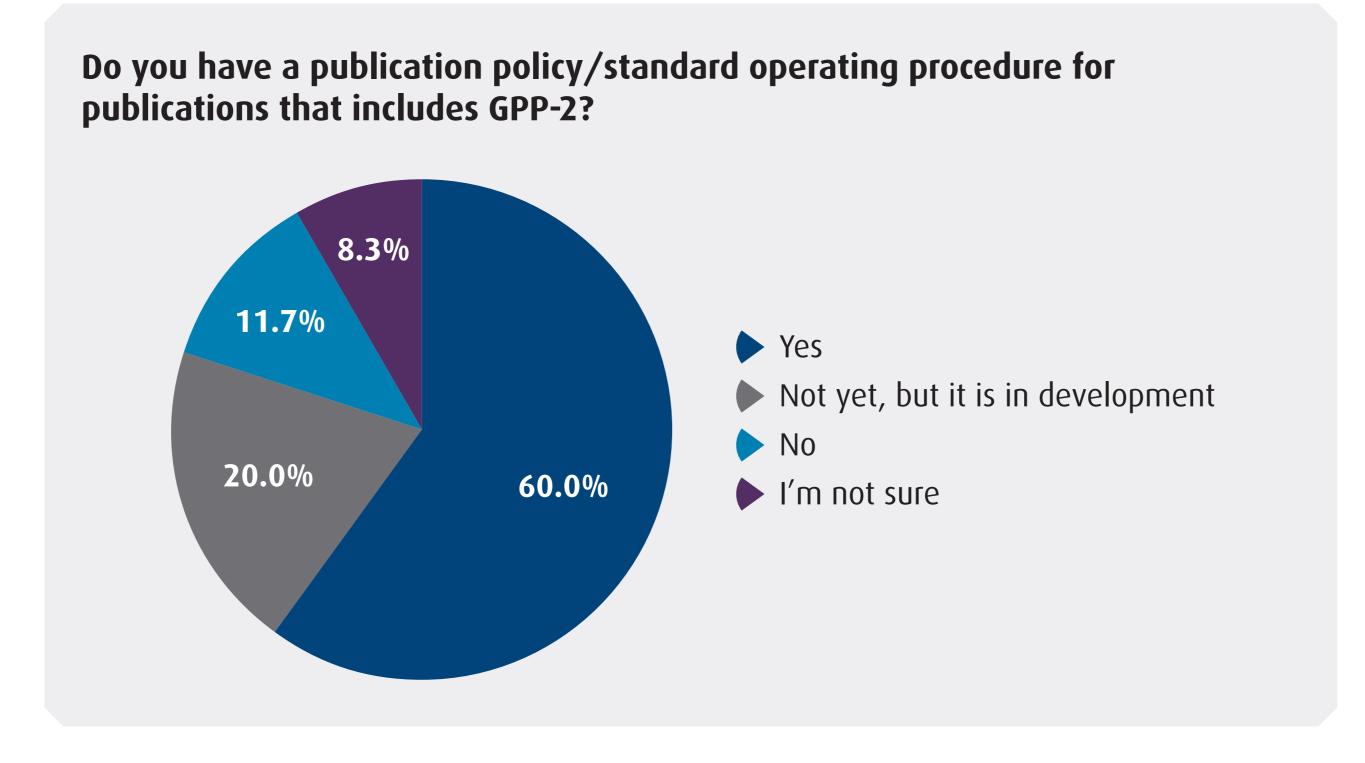
Table 1. Employment of survey respondents

	Number of respondents (%)
Total	63
Pharmaceutical company	25 (39.7%)
Medical communications agency	16 (25.4%)
Publisher	6 (9.5%)
Non-pharmaceutical healthcare company	3 (4.8%)
Other	13 (20.6%)

GPP-2 guidelines are a common part of publication policy

◆ 60% of respondents said they had incorporated the GPP-2 guidelines into their own publications policies. An additional 20% said that their companies had good publications practices under development (Figure 1). This is a positive sign that GPP-2 has had significant industry uptake (though there is still room for improvement).

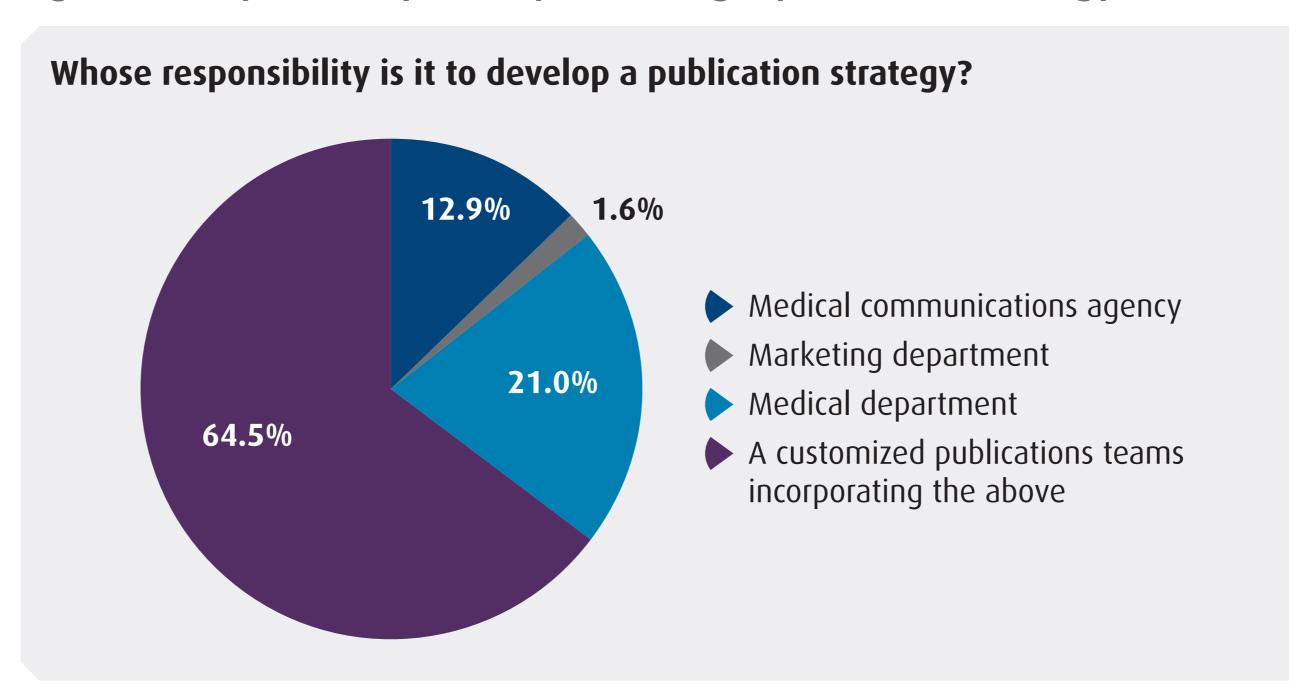
Figure 1. Policy/SOP documents usually include GPP-2



Whose responsibility is it to develop a publication strategy?

• When asked who is responsible for developing/implementing their company's publication strategy, 65% of respondents said that a customized publications team, incorporating medical communications agencies and marketing and medical affairs departments, was already in place (Figure 2). 21% of respondents said that only a medical affairs department was involved, and just one respondent indicated that the publication plan was the marketing department's responsibility, supporting the general trend away from marketing control of publications.

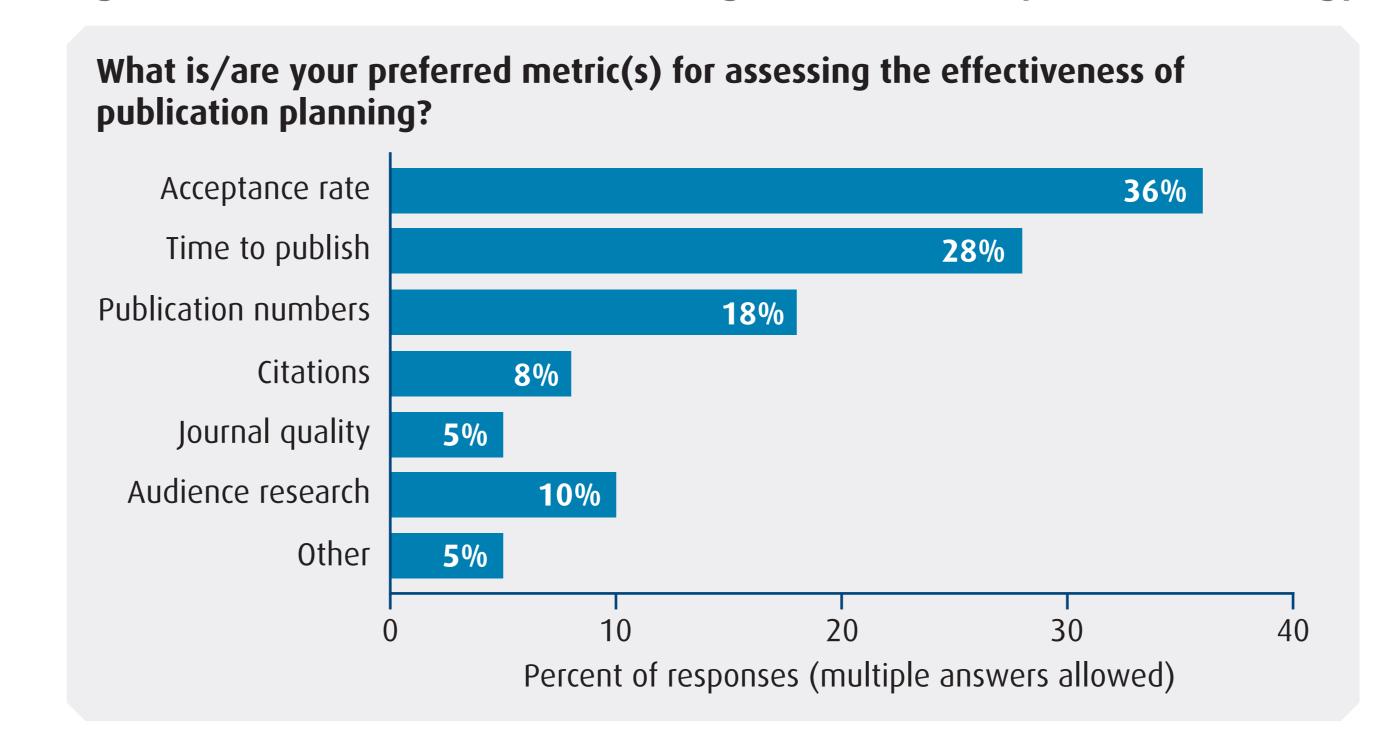
Figure 2. Responsibility for implementing a publication strategy



Preferred metrics

◆ The free text question asking which metrics respondents preferred to use to assess the effectiveness of a publication plan was answered by just 39 of the 63 respondents. Respondents could provide more than one answer to this question; the responses made it clear that there is significant debate on this point, and that the group was far from achieving a consensus. Respondents' written answers were compiled into the categories presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Preferred metrics for assessing the success of a publication strategy



◆ Acceptance rates and speed of publication were rated highest here (36% and 28% of respondents, respectively), while publication citations and the quality of the journal itself lagged far behind as measures of success (8% and 5%, respectively).

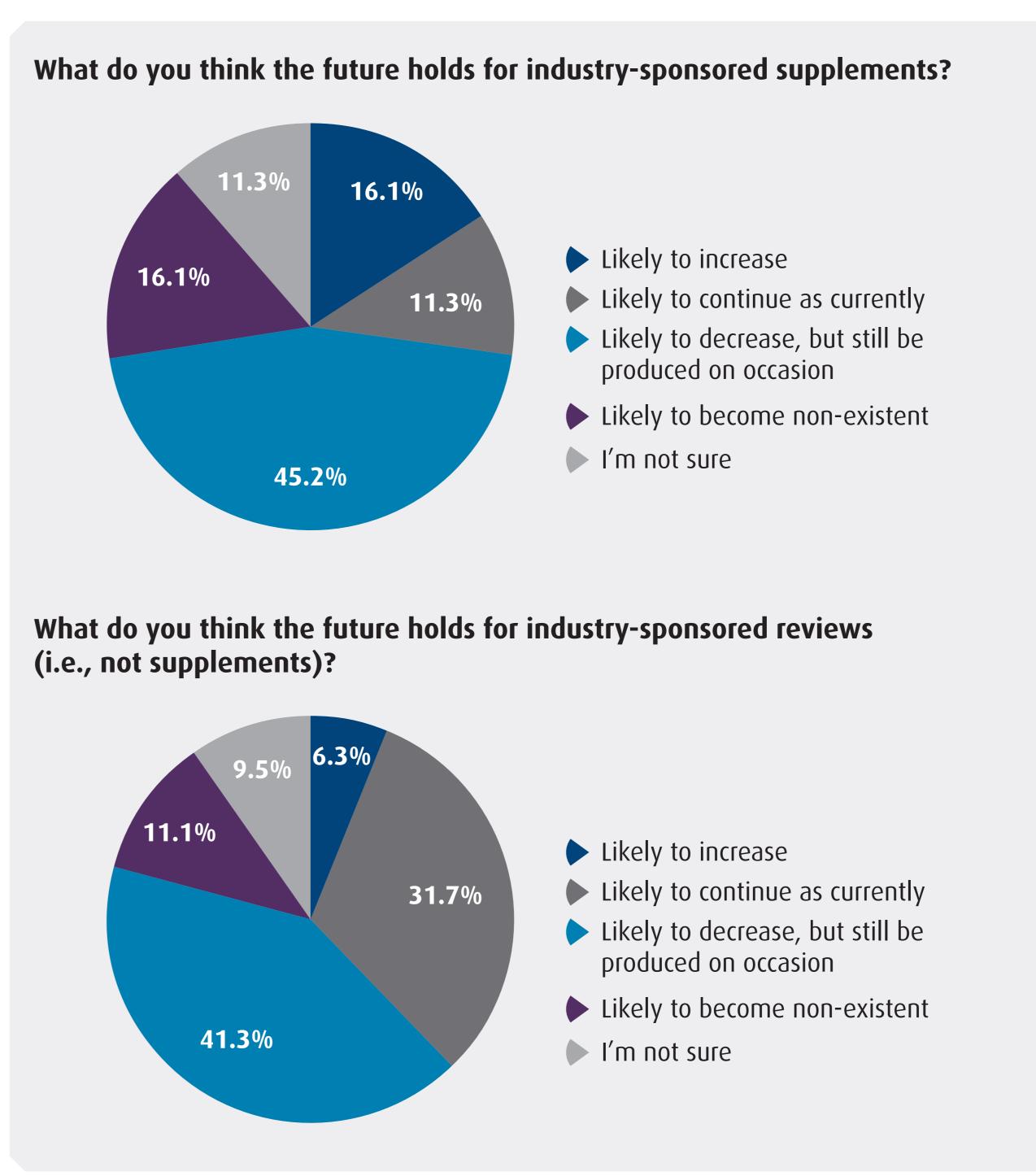
Independent statistical analysis

◆ Independent statistical analysis is an increasingly frequent submission requirement among top tier journals, designed to combat any potential data analysis bias. However, it remains a controversial aspect of publication planning due to the potential cost and possibility of publication delay. Survey respondents were split on whether independent statistical analysis will become a publication planning "norm" at some point in the future; 41.3% believed it would, 27% percent said it would not, and 27% didn't know.

The future of industry-sponsored reviews and supplements

◆ Across all survey respondents, 45.2% and 41.3% expect a future decline in the number of industry-sponsored supplements and reviews, respectively, with 16.1% and 11.1% suggesting these forms of publication will become non-existent (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Future of industry-sponsored supplements and reviews



- ◆ Interestingly, survey responses indicated a marked difference in perspective among different industry groups. Of the six respondents employed by publishers, five believed that the number of industry-sponsored supplements would increase or continue at the same level, while 21 of the 24 respondents employed by pharmaceutical companies felt they would decrease or become non-existent. A similar pattern was noted in these two groups with regard to the perceived future of industry-sponsored reviews.
- ◆ The response from publishers is not entirely surprising, as sponsored supplements in particular represent a major profile point and revenue stream for publishing companies. What is surprising is the seeming disconnect between the publisher respondents and the pharmaceutical company respondents who support supplement development. Although it is clear that it has become increasingly difficult to produce reviews within GPP-2 guidelines, and while sponsored reviews may not be credited with the same weight as non-sponsored reviews, it is unlikely they will disappear completely so long as a need is perceived for publications that educate readers on advances in specific indications, therapies or methods of treatment.

Conclusion

- This brief survey provided some insight into current publication practices of ISMPP members, as well as expectations for the future by this highly aware group.
- ◆ 80% of respondents said that they have either already incorporated GPP-2 guidelines into their existing publications plan or are in the process of doing so.
- There was lack of consensus among respondents with regard to the preferred metrics for monitoring publication plan effectiveness. Developing a strategy for publication planning metrics is clearly an area for future attention and potential discussion at future industry meetings.
- Although the opinion that industry-sponsored reviews and supplements will decline was common in pharmaceutical company respondents, it is interesting to note that publishers do not seem to share this view.

References

- 1. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication. www.icmje.org
- 2. Graf C *et al.* Good publication practice for communicating company sponsored medical research: the GPP2 guidelines. BMJ 2009;339:b4330. www.gpp-guidelines.org

