How to Prepare an Abstract to Submit to a Scientific Meeting
Performance Improvement

Follow the directions below to construct an abstract. These are basic instructions for any abstract. The key to it is to know what headings are required, your word limit, and your audience.

Helpful hints for writing abstracts:
Number one. A scientific abstract is not creative writing. That may sound very simple, but clarity and directness are the keys to presenting your material. Overuse of abbreviations or jargon does not substitute for good writing.
- ✓ Abstracts do not have adverbs that attempt to show importance to the data. The data are the data. So don't use words like, very, quite, extremely…. If you have to use an adverb to describe your project, then you do not trust the importance of your project. Do not use the word significant unless it is in the context of a statistical analysis. In the science world, statistical significance is shown by statistical testing. Changes can have clinical significance (with or without statistical significance), but you only use the word significance in those instances.
- ✓ If you use an abbreviation spell it out first and put the abbreviation in parenthesis.
- ✓ Commonly known abbreviations can be used without first spelling out. For example, in the nursing world RN, LPN, PRN are common enough and are not required to be spelled out first. But NA (nursing assistant) is not. Hospitals usually assign a term for non-licensed patient care assistants, so this abbreviation would be spelled out first. [For example: Patient care technician (PCT), nursing technician (NT)].

Number two. **Follow the directions** as outlined in the author guidelines for the meeting.
- ✓ If there are suggested headings, use them.
- ✓ If there is a word limit, stick to it.
- ✓ If you are asked to provide objectives and references via a particular format, provide them.
- ✓ Once you completed your first draft, do a word-count. Where do you need to cut? After a couple of edits, let someone else read and edit it. Writing an abstract takes time and can be particularly challenging if your word count is limited. A word count of 300 words or less challenges us to state clearly and succinctly the purpose and findings of our project.

Number three. Think of your audience as well as your reviewers as you construct your abstract.
- ✓ Your project may be for a specific specialty area. Think about the conference audience and the reviewers and write to them. Is this a specialty audience? Are all attendees in your same field? If you are in a specialty (say, neonatal nursing) you can be sure unless you are at a neonatal nursing conference that your audience will not have the level of expertise that you do. Your reviewers will be just as inexperienced as your audience, so make sure that you write clearly for those outside of your specialty to understand your project.
- ✓ The first question the reviewers answer on the critique sheet is "Is the problem/purpose of the project clearly stated?" So take time to clearly state your problem. Construct your problem statement before you construct your introductory sentence(s). That way your introduction supports your problem statement and not the other way around. The problem statement is the pivotal piece of your abstract. Your methodology supports your problem. You present your outcomes based on your problem statement.

You have read the basics and now you are ready to develop a scientific abstract. You know the audience and you have written your problem statement. Let's take each section of an abstract and examine what should be included.

Introduction/Background (use the headings suggested in the author guidelines).
This section is for the importance of what led to your problem statement. Don't confuse your reader with excess verbiage. For example, if your project is to improve documentation or completion of a nursing task, tell the reviewers why this is important. It is ok to use data to support the importance, just be sure the data are related to your problem.

For example- [Side note: See how the logic statement takes this quickly from a larger national problem (13,500 addicted infants/year) to an immediate problem (inconsolable babies) to 'we can do something about it' (test the first stool)].

> Many drugs ingested during pregnancy are passed to the baby in utero. Mothers who abuse drugs place their fetus at considerable risk and often the baby is born in a drug-addicted state. Over 13,500 infants are born drug-addicted each year. These babies are often inconsolable, placing them at greater risk for physical abuse or neglect. The infant's first stool or meconium can be tested for evidence of drugs, but there are obstacles in obtaining a specimen for drug testing.

Or

> Preventing falls in the hospitalized patient is a major concern as injury sustained via the fall is no longer a reimbursable charge. However, patients coming in for an outpatient procedure are not typically assessed for fall risk. There is currently a Joint Commission requisite to begin assessing all outpatients for fall risk. The Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) lab is concerned about falls after treatments as ECT can change a person's fall risk. ECT patients return for multiple treatments thus the potential for falls can increase.

Statement of the problem
A simple sentence that describes the problem is sufficient. Performance improvement is about process, so your statement should identify the process that you chose to improve.

For example

> An opportunity existed to improve the drug testing process for infants at high risk for fetal drug and/or alcohol exposure.

Or

> An opportunity exists to reduce the fall rate of ECT patients in the time period between their ECT treatments.

Methods.
Describe the performance improvement methodology used in your project (i.e. FOCUS PCDA, LEAN, Swiss Cheese, Cause & Effect, or Root Cause Analysis). This section can be answered in a single sentence as well.

For example

> A Swiss Cheese analysis and a Fishbone diagram were used to identify barriers to completing a drug test on high risk infants.

Or

> Education and assessment were the methods used to reduce between treatment falls (cause and effect). Baseline data were collected 6 months to determine the rate of falls per 100 ECT treatments. During this time period, 29 falls at home were reported for 436 treatments; an overall rate of 6.65/100 treatments.

Processes addressed
This is where you can describe what you did to achieve your stated improvement. Be sure what you describe here matches your problem statement.

For example

> A process was developed to facilitate detection of, and needed interventions for, drug-addicted infants.   Prenatal drug screens and missing the admission/ pre-delivery drug screen were key processes that required attention. For a normal delivery, the mother/baby may be discharged 24-48 hours after delivery. Some drug-addicted infants may not begin to show signs of withdrawal for 3-5 days after delivery. Thus, if the information is not communicated to the nursery, the opportunity may

have passed to obtain meconium for drug screening, exposing the infant to a possibly unsafe environment. A process to save cord specimens was also developed as a back up to meconium testing.

Or

The ECT staff added a method to assess for falls between ECT treatments. Capturing this information required an alteration in the assessment form as many patients or their caregivers needed to have recollection prompted to remember whether there was a fall. Tips to prevent falls were added to discharge instruction and to the ECT brochure. Education provided to the patient family and caregiver.

Outcomes

What did you measure and what were your outcomes? Address your outcomes stated in the previous section in the same order. For instance, if you changed process X, Y, and Z, then share the outcomes in that order. Your project may have had many results, but stick to the results that support your problem statement.

For example

A decision algorithm was developed and put into practice. Since implementation, the algorithm helped catch 5 misses in time for samples to be collected and sent for drug screen. Seventeen positive babies were identified who received appropriate treatment and moms received appropriate support.

Or

Since the change in focus, falls reduced to 1.9/100 treatments. Most falls occur in the 24-28 hours from the time of the ECT so caregivers are asked to be especially diligent during that time period.

Implications for practice

In this section indicate the importance of your findings. What care was improved from your process improvement project? No need to get global. Think of what this improvement will do to help professionals just like you.

For example

The detection of and appropriate treatment for drug positive infants begin prior to delivery. The information obtained from prenatal and pre-delivery drug screens is needed to facilitate the process for meconium or cord drug testing.

Or

Even though the fall may occur at home, preventing any fall is in the best interest of the patient. ECT is an outpatient treatment that can alter cognition and balance and efforts to emphasize prevention are important.