BASK Presentations: Progress to Journal Publication

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abstract

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Scientific conferences, such as the British Association for Surgery of the Knee (BASK) annual meeting, provide an important channel for the exchange of information between researchers. However, the ultimate means of disseminating research information is publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal. The goal of this study was to follow up published abstracts in the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, British Volume supplement from the annual BASK conference and determine how many presented abstracts progressed to article publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Combined Google Scholar and PubMed searches of 602 BASK abstract titles over a 10-year period were performed, and the resulting articles were reviewed to confirm that they were directly associated with the corresponding abstracts. Two hundred (33.2%) abstracts presented at BASK conferences over a 10-year period were found in online or print format. This amount is comparable with other similar conferences’ publication rates. Only one-third of abstracts presented at the BASK conference were converted to journal publication as full articles. This may be due to multiple rejections, lack of time, relocation of the authors, or a reluctance to publish negative findings. Alternatively, changes in an abstract’s title for publication prevents online search engines from identifying the final article and may explain some disparity. Furthermore, presented abstracts may not survive the strict peer-review process required for journal publication. Because these findings from BASK mirror other specialty meetings, clinicians should accept the results of orthopedic meeting proceedings with some level of caution.

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Although it is widely accepted that the endpoint of a high-quality research study is full peer-reviewed journal publication, a substantial proportion of abstracts presented at medical conferences do not complete this vigorous process. Publication rates of presented abstracts across various orthopedic subspecialties’ meetings range from 23.4% to 41%.1,4

The British Association for Surgery of the Knee (BASK) was established in the early 1980s to represent the knee surgeons in the United Kingdom. Since then, it has grown to become one of the largest orthopedic specialist organizations, bringing together knee surgeons with the single aim of improving patient care. The BASK holds an annual scientific conference and invites researchers to submit abstracts for poster or podium presentations. Following presentation, the abstracts are published in a supplemental issue of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, British Volume (JBJS Br).

Full journal publication rates of presentations from the annual BASK meeting are currently unknown. The goal of this study was to determine the number of articles that are subsequently published following presentation at BASK conferences.

Materials and Methods

The JBJS Br proceedings Web site was accessed to collate abstract titles from BASK meetings over an 8-year period from 2002 through 2009.2 Furthermore, a physical search of abstract titles in journals’ print copies from a National Health Service hospital library was required for the years 2000 and 2001 because the JBJS Br proceedings Web site database starts with 2002 and does not hold any earlier electronic data. These dates were chosen to provide a reasonable time period to submit, make changes, and publish since the index presentation.

Each abstract title was entered into the electronic search engines Google Scholar and PubMed, which allows access to the Medline database. In cases with no direct match, further attempts were made to identify a potential publication with a modified title. Various combinations of words were used, such as first and last author’s names and the most characteristic key words from the abstract title. If a matching publication was identified, the authors and abstract were reviewed to confirm the publication resulted directly from the research presented at the BASK conference.

The name of the journal in which the article was published was also recorded, and the average time from presentation to publication was calculated.

Results

A total of 602 abstract titles were retrieved from the JBJS Br proceedings database. Of 602 abstract titles, 200 were found online as full journal publications. This equates to a publishing rate of 33.2% following presentation. The Table shows the distribution of published articles in peer-reviewed journals. Fourteen of 27 abstracts from the March 2000 conference were published, which equates to a 52% publication rate for that year. A declining trend existed for abstracts from 2001 through 2009. On average, each abstract took 23 months (range, 0-129 months) from presentation to publication. Overall, 19 abstracts were published in the window after abstract submission and before the conference date. These were not included in the calculations.

The publication rate was 39.7% between 2000 and 2004; it dropped to 29.3% between 2005 and 2009.

Discussion

The number of abstracts published following presentation at the BASK conference was within the expected range (compared with similar subspecialty conferences): one-third of abstracts presented over 10 years achieved publication.

The BASK conference is a platform for United Kingdom registrars and fellows to present their unit’s work. Therefore, it seems logical that many prefer to have their work published in a journal that has a wide readership among their peers. Be-
cause *Knee* is the main peer-reviewed scientific journal with an affiliation to knee surgery in the United Kingdom, it was not surprising that many publications appeared there. This may also explain the low publication rate in *Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research* and the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, American Volume*.

Sprague et al.\(^6\) surveyed authors of unpublished abstracts from the 63rd annual meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons to identify reasons for the failure to publish. They concluded that the 3 main reasons for failure to publish cited by authors were lack of time, ongoing projects, or issues with coauthors.\(^6\) Acceptance for publication may also be hindered if null or negative scientific findings are reported. It has been shown that articles with negative findings take considerably longer to progress from trial completion to publication.\(^7\)

Of more concern is the possibility that abstracts presented at the selected BASK conferences may not pass the scrutiny of formal journal peer review. Although all published abstracts will have been reviewed and scored by the BASK committee prior to acceptance, it is notoriously difficult to gauge the scientific quality of studies from a short abstract alone. During the journal-peer review process, problems with study design, analysis, and conclusions may come to light. In addition, many abstracts presented at conferences may include preliminary findings.

One of the limitations of the current study is that the true publication rate could differ due to the search criteria used. The identification of articles using electronic databases, such as PubMed, is imperfect, with retrieval rates of approximately 80%.\(^8\) Title alterations between abstract and final publication can also prevent publication retrieval; for example, the presented abstract “Feasibility of Day Surgery for Knee Replacement” was subsequently published under the title “Accelerated Recovery for Unicompartmental Knee Replacement: A Feasibility Study.”\(^9\) By using 2 different search engines and trying different combinations of search words, the authors attempted to minimize the number of false-negative results.

The ratio of published articles vs presented abstracts has also gradually decreased in recent years. This may be caused by several factors. The number of abstracts that were published continually increased throughout the 10-year study period, which may suggest that the reviewing and selection process of the submitted abstracts was less strict. However, the journals may have used a more vigorous publication process to improve the scientific quality. It is also possible that some studies are still being considered by the journals. A good example of this is an article that was presented in 2001 and subsequently published in 2008.\(^10\)

**Conclusion**

The publication rate of abstracts from BASK conferences over a 10-year period was found to be 33.2%, which is in keeping with that of other similar orthopedic meetings.\(^1-4\) The regular review of journal publication rates following orthopedic surgery conferences may be used as a surrogate marker of the quality of the presented data and the effectiveness of the abstract review process.

Although BASK conferences may stimulate debate and the exchange of ideas, some level of caution should be used in translating these preliminary research findings into the setting of clinical knee surgery prior to formal journal peer review. However, some negative study findings, which are also important to the peer-reviewed literature, may only be propagated at such subspecialty meetings.

**References**

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