

# The Evolving Trend in Plain Language Summaries of Publications

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## Objectives

Plain language summaries of publications (PLSPs) help to disseminate research information in an accurate and easy-to-understand format. Patient advocates have championed for PLSPs and more journals are encouraging, or even requiring, PLSPs. There is little information available on how widespread PLSPs have become. The objectives of this study, therefore, were:

- ▶ To quantify the number of PLSPs available in the public domain
- ▶ To identify trends in the publication of these documents

## Methods

For this analysis, PLSPs are summaries of articles published in life sciences journals written in plain language for patients and/or the general public. Identifying which journals accept PLSPs is challenging, not least because different journals use different terminologies for PLSPs. We used our knowledge and an online search to determine the journals to be included in the analysis. Each journal's author's instructions and guidance were reviewed to confirm that they accepted PLSPs. Keywords used in the search included plain language summary of publication, plain language summary, plain English summary, lay summary, and patient summaries. Searches were further refined using filters such as: type of articles – original article, review, or correction. Results were spot checked to confirm that PLSPs were included.

For every journal accepting PLSPs, we determined:

- ▶ Total number published
- ▶ Number published by year
- ▶ Format accepted by the journal
- ▶ Therapy areas included

We also tried to identify the type of study (observational or interventional) and study phase; however, this was not easy to identify in most journals. The data cut-off for the results in this poster was 23-Mar-2023.

The methodology applied has certain limitations:

- ▶ Information about which journals accept PLSPs is not easily available, thus we have only included journals that were known to accept PLSPs.
- ▶ The numbers have been calculated using search options available on journals' websites. This differed between journals.
- ▶ It was not possible to check every PLSP to check it was written at an appropriate readability level for patients and the general public.

**Disclaimer:** All authors are employees of Krystelis Ltd, where post this publication, writing reviews including PLSPs.

## Results

### Number of PLSPs by Journal

Among the 11 journals included, eLife has published the most PLSPs (3,799), followed by PLoS Medicine (1,480), and the British Journal of Dermatology (1,471). Certain journals only publish articles targeted towards a non-scientific audience. For example, articles published in Frontiers for Young Minds are written for children aged between 8 and 12.

PLSPs were also found in other libraries and databases, e.g. Cochrane Library (8573 PLSPs published), National Library of Medicine (34), and National Institute for Health and Care Research (34). The British Psychological Society has published 10 PLSPs as research digests.

Figure 1. Number of PLSPs by Journal



### Different Formats

PLSP formats in journals varies. The main categories are:

- ▶ Standalone articles: Usually published independently of the original article. These include a reference to the original article and have their own digital object identifier (DOI).
- ▶ Abstracts: Either structured (with specific headings) or unstructured (without any headings) and published with the original article, usually after the scientific abstract.
- ▶ Supplementary materials: Published with the original research as supplementary material. There is no separate DOI.

Journal Name	Standalone article	Abstract	Supplementary material
Future Medicine	✓	✓	✓
British Journal of Dermatology	✓		
Annals of Rheumatic Diseases	✓		
Frontiers for Young Minds	✓		
Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Medicine		✓	
eLife		✓	
PLoS Medicine		✓	
Therapeutic Advances in Drug Safety		✓	
The Patient - Patient-Centered Outcomes Research		✓	
Patient Preference and Adherence		✓	
BMJ Medicine			✓

### Different Names

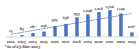
The lack of consistency in the names used for PLSPs and journal requirements is a key challenge with the discoverability of PLSPs.



## PLSPs by Year of Publication

The number of PLSPs published has increased over the last 10 years. eLife posted PLSPs earliest (2012), then the Annals of Rheumatic Diseases (2013), and the British Journal of Dermatology (2014).

Figure 2. Total Number of PLSPs Published by Year



### PLSPs by Therapy Area

Neurology, infectious diseases, and oncology have the most PLSPs.

Figure 3. PLSP Distribution for the Most Common Therapy Areas



## Conclusions

The number of PLSPs published each year is increasing. Generally, journals that first started publishing PLSPs (e.g., eLife and British Journal of Dermatology) have the most available. Neurology, infectious diseases, and oncology therapy areas have the most PLSPs. PLSPs are posted under many formats and names; hence, are challenging to find and quantify. Journal guidance on PLSPs is not always clear. There is a need for uniformity in PLSP naming conventions and other requirements within the life sciences industry.