Author’s response to reviews

Title: Good Practice for Conference Abstracts & Presentations: GPCAP

Authors:

Cate Foster (Cate.foster@gpcap.org)
Elizabeth Wager (liz@sideview.demon.co.uk)
Jackie Marchington (Jackie.Marchington@caudex.com)
Mina Patel (Mina.Patel@alexion.com)
Steve Banner (steve.banner@Pharmagensis.com)
Nina Kennard (nkennard@ch-medergy.co.uk)
Antonia Panayi (apanayi@shire.com)
Rianne Stacey (Rianne.Stacey@jazzpharma.com)

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Author’s response to reviews:

We thank the two reviewers for their comments, and the opportunity to revise our article in light of those comments: we believe the article is much stronger now, and some areas greatly clarified.

Reviewer 1

1.1

The title, "Good Practice for Conference Abstracts & Presentations" implies that this guidance is for all conference abstracts and presentations. However, this guidance appears mainly directed to commercially supported work. Perhaps the title should be changed to "Good Practice for Commercially Sponsored Conference Abstracts & Presentations"

Response: We believe these recommendations are applicable to all submissions and hope academic authors will also find them useful. We prefer to keep the title in its current form.

1.2

I am unable to locate the prior document that was posted to PeerJ and it is not referenced.
Response: We are sorry you couldn’t trace the preprint, but we are now referencing it (new reference 10), so it will be traceable by readers, along with the feedback received at that point.

1.3

Throughout - there is a fair amount of redundancy in this report. Even though the authors note there is some overlap, it does not seem necessary. I suggest rewriting to avoid the overlap.

Response: We recognise that there is some repetition, but we structured these recommendations to allow readers to focus on specific areas of interest (as noted by Reviewer #2), rather than be read in a linear fashion.

1.4

Line 105: This comment seems a bit self-congratulatory: "All comments received, either via PeerJ or by direct email, were positive."

Response: We are removing this comment and directing readers to the feedback on the preprint. Readers can then make their own judgement on the nature of the comments.

1.5

How many representatives of the 65 medical societies and medical conference sites responded? What do they represent?

Response: This is included in the text (original line 99) but we have clarified it (see Methods). Given the high level of non-response, we think it unwise to provide a full list of those approached for this baseline set of recommendations. We would certainly consider this for future revisions of these recommendations.

1.6

I don't think this effort, as described, merit these recommendations being positioned as "guidelines."

Response: We have changed “guidelines” to “recommendations” throughout.

1.7

RE: "Study registration numbers (e.g. ClinicalTrials.gov, EudraCT) should be included on abstracts, posters, and slides." - Does this pertain only to reports of clinical trials?
Response: Actually, no, and thank you for pointing this out. We have added an example of another type of study registry in the text.

1.8

For the principle and recommendations on funding identification - would be good to see a requirement for explanation of the role of the sponsor/funder in the research and presentation.

Response: We do not disagree, but think it is impractical to include this level of granularity at the principle level. We also need conference organizers to enable such functionality in their submission sites and formatting requirements, as noted in sections 2.1 and 2.3.

1.9

The comments about authorship and use of study groups seems inconsistent with best practice. Placing an arbitrary limit on the number of authors and then indicating that a group name can be used ignores the need for accountability for all "authors," including those who are members of a group. This could be addressed in more detail.

Response: We believe the use of study groups aligns with section II.A.2 of the current ICMJE recommendations re authorship.

We encourage conferences/sponsors not to arbitrarily limit the number of permitted authors (original line 204). However, thinking about the number of authors who can contribute to an abstract of about 250 words in length, we do suggest that there are practical limitations to the number of authors who can play a meaningful role and agree with the practical number of ~10, as suggested in GPP3.

1.10

Section 1.1.3 This is concerning. Sounds as if this group believes it is acceptable to have an abstract prepared by nonauthors and to do so before a final full manuscript is ready, which presumably, would also include an abstract. Would need to be careful about version control and inconsistencies in versions.

Response: We are not advocating the preparation of abstracts by non-authors.

We refer to a clinical study report (CSR), which is the technical documentation disclosing the protocol and full results that is prepared (usually) by the contract research organization responsible for conducting the study. The CSR is the definitive data source for all publications from the study and will contain data on recruitment and patient disposition, every prespecified efficacy and safety endpoint and details of any protocol amendments or other changes to the conduct of the study. If the CSR is not finalized when authors need to begin working on a
conference abstract, they will work from tables, figures and listings, without the narrative that would be in the finalized CSR.

We believe the Reviewer may be confusing a conference abstract with the abstract of a full manuscript for journal submission, which summarizes the paper.

1.11

Section 1.1.4 is also concerning. A translator likely may not qualify for authorship. Why not just acknowledge the contribution of the translator?

Response: We agree, and are not discussing translators as authors. We are suggesting that if an author is not fluent in the language in which the abstract is being presented, sponsors might offer the assistance of a formal translation or native language speaker to help the authors review/approve an abstract in a language other than their own.

The translator would not be contributing to the content of the abstract, so acknowledgement would not necessarily be appropriate.

1.12

Why would authors "choose not to be listed for such a conference abstract and presentation?"

Response: Please see original line 193 (section 1.1.6)

1.13

Section 1.1.5 - what about naming a "corresponding author" or "primary presenter?" What about requests for co-first or co-last authorship?

Response: A corresponding author is not the norm for conference abstracts. The presenting author is nominally the “corresponding author” if required.

Co-first/last authorship requests are uncommon for conference abstracts as only one author can present, but we have added a comment in the text of section 1.1.5.

1.14

Section 1.2 - This document does not address how to manage study group members who are "authors" vs "non-author collaborators" who are also members of the group.
Response: These individuals are not authors on the abstract. If a non-author collaborator made a significant contribution not warranting authorship, we recommend they be credited in the presentation acknowledgements (original line 355)

See also original line 219 regarding study group membership details

1.15

Throughout - there are references to "if space permits." If there is important information that cannot fit on an abstract/poster - could a link to website with this information be provided?

Response: This is discussed in section 3.1.7

1.16

There is no guidance on best practices for Titles, Tables, Graphs.

Response: This is out of scope for these recommendations. We are offering recommendations as to the development and submission process for conference abstracts and presentations, not on the quality of the presentations.

1.17

Section 3.2.2 This statement "Posters are not peer-reviewed by conferences" does not appear to be accurate. Many conference peer review abstracts submitted for poster presentation.

Response: Submitted abstracts are screened by a scientific committee and accepted or rejected for presentation, but posters and oral presentations are not peer reviewed. We have addressed this in our revised Introduction

1.18

Section 3.2.3 - "The lead author" - who is this? First, Last/Senior?

Response: We have clarified this in the text and added “Lead author” to our “Note on terminology” section

Reviewer 2
The authors have created comprehensive guidance on an important issue - how to disclose and communicate company-sponsored research at academic conferences. The guidance they have developed is organized in a way that will help publication professionals, professional medical writers and project managers to work with authors and conference organizers to develop abstracts, posters and oral presentations appropriately and ethically. The authors have consulted widely on their draft guidelines, including posting a preprint for comment. I recommend the article for publication in Research Integrity and Peer Review.

Response: Thank you

2.1

Reporting the development of guidelines is never straightforward, and there is room for different points of view on how it should best be done. My recommendation to the authors would be to follow an Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRAD) structure, as in published examples of other initiatives [1, 2]. This recommendation is informed by the AGREE II recommendations (http://www.agreetrust.org/agree-ii/), which the authors could consider referring to and citing.

Response: We do not believe that IMRAD is the correct structure for these recommendations – e.g. we have no “Results” per se. However, we have considered our section structure and revised for clarity.

2.2

Introduction

At the opening of the Introduction, it would be worth explaining the importance of scientific and medical conferences for early communication of and feedback on results, and perhaps mentioning that some analyses are only ever disseminated as abstracts [3]. Of course, conference presentations are as relevant for research funded by industry as for research with other funding, and it might be worth touching on the particular significance to pharmaceutical companies of ensuring that results are communicated in an ethical and appropriate way. As the authors explain, although there are well-established guidelines for the preparation of journal articles reporting industry-funded research, these are not fully applicable to industry-funded abstracts, posters and oral presentations. This explanation would be a good lead-in to stating the aim of these guidelines, which would ideally be expressed in a sentence at the end of the Introduction.

Response: Thank you for these suggestions – we have updated the introduction to incorporate these.

2.3
Methods

Expanding the Development section into a Methods section would further strengthen the article. It could include details of composition of the working group (and, in broad terms, how its members were selected - for example, to ensure coverage of Europe and North America, include pharmaceutical company and communications agency perspectives, and involve people with previous guidelines development experience), as well as mentioning any society involvement/endorsement. A statement could be included to indicate which existing sources of guidance were reviewed (with references to GPP3 and ICMJE guidelines), and any searches that were conducted to support the process could be described.

There is room to say more about how the GPCAP guidance was developed and reviewed (e.g. whether key principles were agreed before writing, whether an outline was developed, whether different authors developed individual sections that were then reviewed by the wider authorship group, and how recommendations specific to different target audiences were developed). One AGREE II criterion is that "The guideline is editorially independent from the funding body" and, while the authors received no funding for this work, a comment on whether the GPCAP guidance was reviewed by colleagues in the authors' organizations would be worthwhile. The wider consultation exercise was a major effort for which the authors deserve much credit, and (not least for the benefit of future guidelines developers) it merits the inclusion of additional details, such as:

- the selection of conferences and/or conference organizers (e.g. by giving the criteria or list used)
- how pharmaceutical industry and communication agency representatives were reached very effectively via conferences and social media
- how many comments were received from how many commenters (if possible).

The PeerJ preprint could then be cited in the reference list if the journal allows.

Response: Thank you for the suggestion. We have expanded (and renamed) this section. In the interests of full disclosure, we have also described the involvement of any of our employers who required us to submit our contributions for compliance/legal review.

2.4

Results

Reformulating the main guidelines sections as a Results section would enable the authors to provide an upfront overview to guide the reader through the document (e.g. "we developed x principles that were used to develop y recommendations under z themes." Other than that, I have only minor comments on the content of the guidelines, as follows.
Response: We have renamed this section “Recommendations”. As the recommendations are all experience driven or opinion based, we believe “Results” is not appropriate.

The way the recommendations are currently organized will assist readers in finding what they want, quickly, indeed, as noted in one of your previous comments. We don’t feel that quantifying the number of recommendations adds anything for the end user.

2.5

Lines 115/116 - 'local language presenters' - do the authors mean 'local presenters' as described in 1.3.1?

Response: Yes, thank you. We have amended the text to clarify

2.6

Section 1.3.1 (line 231) - could this local presenter be a company representative as mentioned in 1.3.2?

Response: One of the strengths of these recommendations is that they recognize the limitations with conference abstract presentations, and differentiate between presenters and authors.

Section 1.3.1 covers situations where a presenter (vs an author) may enter the scene, using the example of a local presenter: Section 1.3.2 details what knowledge a presenter would need to have, using the example of a suitably qualified company representative.

2.7

Section 1.3.2 (line 239) - could a local presenter who is a company representative be listed as an author? Currently, it reads as if non-author presenters could include a company representative but it is unclear whether or not a company representative could be an author presenter. For clarity, it might help to combine and shorten sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2.

Response: Yes. However, an individual whose only role was presenting would be listed as an author only if the conference rules insisted on it (see original line 233).

If a company representative qualified as an author, then they would be an author (see line 171, section 1.1.2) and if attending the conference, would be a suitable author presenter. We have added a statement at the beginning of section 1.3.2 that “Abstract authors (including company authors) attending a conference should always be preferred as presenters over non-author presenters” which we hope clarifies things.
We believe these are two separate points and that sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 should remain separate. We have also added Figure 2 that outlines when a presenter may not be an author (and why).

2.8

My understanding is that the authors advise the following: encore presentations can be presented by someone not on the original author list, ideally as a contributor but as an author if the congress requires it, and this presenter can be an appropriately qualified company representative if necessary.

Response: This is correct. See also the new Figure 2.

Just for clarity, primary presentations could also be presented by a non-author in extenuating circumstances, if permitted by the conference.

2.9

Section 1.3.3 (lines 243-8) - this section feels inconsistent with the previous section. Taken together, they read as if an author can be added to an encore abstract but only if he or she is not a member of the society sponsoring the conference; otherwise, he or she has to be listed as a contributor rather than an author. It is unclear whether the GPCAP authors believe that a sponsoring society member who is a presenter can be added as an author. It would be helpful for the authors to clarify their views here.

Response: This section deals with society conferences that insist at least one author should be a member of the society (society sponsor).

If the only role of such an individual is to fulfil the role of society sponsor (i.e. doesn’t qualify as an author and can’t speak to the research) then they should be included by preference as a contributor rather than an author. If the conference wants them listed as an author, their sole role as sponsor should be indicated in some way. This applies to primary presentations as well as encores.

If a genuine author happened to be a society member, then no such distinction would be necessary.

2.10

Section 2.3 (line 261) - would it be clearer to say that space limitations usually preclude acknowledgement of writing support in the abstract text, and recommend that conference organizers should consider requesting this information and publishing it alongside the abstract?
Response: Yes, thank you. We have appropriated this wording.
2.11

Section 2.6 (line 272) - is it worth clarifying that secondary analyses can be submitted for conference presentation after the primary analysis has been published (in other words, that abstracts submitted for presentation after the primary analysis has been published should add something new)?

Response: We have added text to this effect.

2.12

Section 2.7 (line 286) - the authors could consider adding that ideally the online submission should be checked and completed by the lead author even if it is prepared by a third party.

Response: While we agree that the submission should ideally be checked by the lead author, practically, this would make timely abstract submissions virtually impossible.

We have discussed this further in the text.

2.13

Section 3.2.1 (line 341) - would the authors consider adding that the lead author should check company policies as well as journal policies before agreeing to a poster being publicly posted?

Response: Agreed. Inserted “and of the sponsor company”.

2.14

Section 3.2.4 (line 358-62) - in my experience, while companies aim to restrict the online availability of e-posters solely to conference delegates, it is not always possible to ensure that non-delegates cannot access them. Would the authors consider rewording 'these should only be available to conference attendees' to 'these should be targeted at conference attendees only'? Partly in an effort to restrict readership to delegates, some companies (but not all) limit the duration of online availability of e-posters to the duration of the conference, or to a month, several months or a year; would the authors consider deleting the words 'in such cases' and rewording the sentence to say that online availability of e-posters can also be time limited?

Response: We’re not sure that changing the wording as you suggest would help? We are satisfied that our recommendation is that conference materials are intended for conference delegates only.

It is the responsibility of the conference organizer to control the distribution of conference materials – we don’t think any additional recommendations from us would help here.
We have deleted “in such cases” as requested.

2.15

The potential for QR codes to link to author videos, data sharing statements and presenter contact details could be covered in this section. Augmented reality (in which viewing the poster through a smartphone provides access to enhanced content) could also be mentioned.

When considering the online availability of posters, oral presentations and author videos or other materials accessed by QR codes or augmented reality, the authors could indicate that the lack of peer review of these materials (as opposed to the abstracts on which they are based) should be taken into account.

Response: We think it would be out of scope of these recommendations to suggest specific digital enhancements and how they may be used. We have been intentionally tech agnostic by simply using “QR code (or similar link)”.

The lack of peer review is covered in the revised introduction and in sections 3.2.2 and 6.2. We would suggest that abstracts are scientifically screened rather than fully peer reviewed.

2.16

Section 4.3 (line 410) - could the authors indicate where previous presentations should be listed (in the abstract or in the poster)?

Response: We suggest in section 4.4 that the submission site could collect this information

2.17

Section 4.5 (line 418) - consider replacing 'other than' with 'beyond a simple'.

Response: We prefer to keep as is – “simple” has an element of subjectivity

2.18

Section 4.7 (line 430) - it would be worth detailing what is meant by a different audience, which might be based on geography, therapeutic area or job role (e.g. payer, pharmacist, nurse).

Response: Agreed. We have added examples at the end of the first bullet

2.19
Section 5.2 (line 451) - do the authors have a view about whether a copyright statement should be included on posters and in oral presentations?

Response: As a group, we think that adding such a statement on pharma sponsored posters and oral presentations would mark them out from academic contributions and potentially lead to unintended consequences for pharma sponsors and conference organizers.

For example, conference organizers could update their terms and conditions to extend the copyright transfer/licensing rights that occur on abstract submission beyond the abstract. That is already a risk with this section of our recommendations.

2.20

Overall, one aspect of congress posters and oral presentations that the authors have not covered is author agreements, not only in relation to the content and copyright (see section 5.2) but also in relation to the reimbursement of congress fees, and travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses once a presentation has been given. If this is beyond the scope of these guidelines, perhaps this could be made clear in the aims and scope, in a section on limitations and/or a comment about further work.

Response: We believe that author agreements are beyond the scope of these recommendations, and are covered sufficiently in GPP3.

We have mentioned this in the discussion.

2.21

Another aspect that could be addressed is the emergence of predatory conferences and tools to recognize and avoid them (e.g. Think - Check - Attend).

Response: Conference selection is beyond the scope of these recommendations. However, we recognize that predatory conferences are problematic and are considering adding some helpful materials/links on our website (gpcap.org)

2.22

Finally, the authors could consider directing readers to useful resources on the preparation of legible, readable and engaging posters and oral presentations.

Response: Again, we believe this is out of scope for these recommendations. We are offering recommendations as to the development and submission process for conference abstracts and presentations, not on the quality of the presentations.
However, as above, we are considering adding links on our website that can be constantly updated as required.

2.23 Discussion

The Summary section could be expanded into a Discussion section detailing implications, strengths and limitations, and further work. In my view, GPCAP is a milestone that has the potential to maintain high standards and share best practice, increase confidence in the communication of industry-funded research and ultimately benefit patient care. Further research could include assessment of usage and impact, which could feed into any future update.

Response: We agree, and have expanded (and renamed) the discussion section.

2.24 Availability of data and material (line 518).

I recommend adding 'Comments on the preprint are available online' under this heading. Would the authors make tabulated data available to interested researchers on request?

Response: Thank you for the suggestion, we will do so. We have no data as such, and all comments are accessible on the PeerJ site. We received no meaningful feedback from other sources (other than minor editorial corrections).

2.25 Competing interests (line 520)

Some readers might feel sceptical about people working in or for the pharmaceutical industry stating that they have no competing interests. I can understand that there may be no competing interests as such, but it might be worth discussing with the journal whether a heading such as 'Disclosures' could be used instead of 'Competing interests' to disclose the authors' industry links. Some industry critics think that any links with a commercial organization must be a 'competing interest'; I would avoid giving them opportunities to criticize this very valuable initiative for perceived lack of transparency.

Response: Thank you. We have requested this from the journal editors.
Addition of a simple but memorable Figure that provides an overview of the guidelines would be very helpful, perhaps accompanied by or combined with a Figure summarizing the methodology by which the guidelines were generated.

Response: We have added two figures, one roadmap, as you suggest and one to help differentiate between authors and non-authors presenters. We hope the revised methodology section is clear enough now not to require an additional figure.