

## **P2 – Plain-language summaries of publications: Who, what, when, where, and why**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

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Plain-language summaries of publications (PLSPs) are full, standalone, peer-reviewed articles written in approachable, non-technical language intended to allow scholarly research to be understood by non-specialist audiences. PLSPs are relatively new, but increasingly in demand. This study examined the who, what, when, where, and why of published PLSPs.

### **METHODS**

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Embase, MEDLINE, and CENTRAL were searched via Ovid for PLSPs published between January 1, 2004 and February 1, 2024. The following were extracted: publication date, journal, source study type, page length, medical writer involvement, and patient/lay author involvement. The average grade level of the PLSP abstracts was assessed via readabilityformulas.com. Analysis of variance was performed with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

### **RESULTS**

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151 PLSPs were identified. All were open access. The first was published in 2015; 85% were published since 2021. 14 journals have published PLSPs. Most PLSPs (67%) describe clinical trial results. Most were supported by medical writers (85%) but did not include patient/lay authors (17%). Median length was 9.3 pages (range, 2–23). Median grade level was 14 (range, 9–24); grade level was  $\geq 12$  for 85%. Grade level was lower with medical writer involvement ( $p=0.0043$ ) but unchanged by patient/lay author involvement ( $p>0.9999$ ).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

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Publication of PLSPs has been rapidly increasing since they first appeared in 2015. Although medical writing support appears to improve their readability, most may be too difficult and too long to be easily understood by patients or other non-specialists. Clearer guidance and more attention are needed to produce PLSPs that are effective at informing non-specialists.