

HCG INSIGHTS FROM ISMPP EU-2025

Core Values for an Integrated Age

Overview

HCG were proud to be sponsors of **The International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) 2025 European Meeting**. There was a record-breaking attendance this year with **418 attendees** joining the meeting in London from 27 to 29 January 2025, which brought together professionals in medical publications and communications under the theme **Core Values for an Integrated Age**. This theme emphasized the importance of upholding foundational principles such as integrity, transparency, and patient partnerships and the necessity of being forward-thinking as we embrace technological advancements intertwined with human insight and patient involvement.

Key highlights

Patient involvement - beyond traditional authorship

- > Patients are becoming equal partners in scientific conferences and publications. However, barriers like complex processes, lack of mentorship, and financial constraints persist. Standardized support systems are needed to empower patient voices.

AI applications in pharma and collaborating with authors

- > AI applications are being piloted to find efficiencies and enhance workflows, though full implementation in publications is still in progress. When collaborating with authors, early communication, transparency, and ethical considerations are crucial for integrating AI effectively.

Good Publication Practice (GPP) refinements

- > The future of GPP depends on industry-wide collaboration, particularly in AI integration, patient authorship, real-world evidence (RWE), and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Clear guidelines and new engagement metrics are still needed.

Data visualization and storytelling

- > Blending data visualization with storytelling techniques can transform complex scientific data into engaging and impactful narratives. This approach enhances appeal, impact, comprehension, and retention without compromising scientific integrity.



Session highlights

Looking beyond traditional authorship: Partnering with patients for inclusion in scientific conferences

ISMPP has transformed over the past 6 years with patient involvement now active, rather than just discussions and tokenism. We are now even talking beyond patient authorship and looking at patient involvement at scientific congresses in a partnership role not just as token guests.

Award-winning patient advocate Mercy Shibemba shared her experience of growing up with HIV and the associated stigma, and she highlighted the power of patient involvement in the success of impactful campaigns such as “Undetectable = Untransmissible”.

Compliance has been a reason given by many to not actively consider patient involvement. Rina Newton (Code Charity UK) highlighted that EU regulations do not prevent patients from attending or speaking at conferences. Simon Stones (Amica Scientific) emphasized the need to move beyond token inclusion, investing in patient leadership and including them as equal partners.

Overall, the panel's message was that patients are not passive participants, they are experts whose valuable insights can drive progress.

Key considerations:

- > **Compliance clarity:** Educate teams on regulatory guidelines
- > **Invest in patient leadership programs,** and create mentorship and training for patients participating in congresses
- > **Commitment to action:** More leadership is needed, and people must “face the fear” in order to ensure that patient involvement at scientific congresses is not just a discussion, but an action

A discussion on use cases and the adoption of AI within a pharmaceutical, biotech or device company

A year ago, it was not transparent what pharma companies were doing in terms of exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in publications. This session provided insights from speakers from three pharma companies – Pippa Hadland (AstraZeneca), Tom Grant (UCB), and Swati Krishnan (Boehringer Ingelheim) – and how they are piloting AI applications within their organizations.

Key areas they are communicating around desired applications of AI in medical communications are:

- > **Making life easier** for day-to-day tasks (not to replace medical writers)
- > **Application in areas** such as systematic literature searches, review summaries, and plain language summary (PLS) generation

None of the companies had reached the stage where they are trialling AI tools for publications submissions or presentations. A common narrative across the companies was that bottom line cost-cutting is not a reason for AI implement, but rather its potential to enhance workflows. Although each company is trialling AI tools developed internally, they are ideally looking for agency partnership, so it is important for agencies to be developing their own AI capabilities too.

Key considerations:

- > **Monitor AI advancements,** track and assess their potential to streamline workflows within your organizations, and the application of AI in publications
- > **Develop internal guidelines** for AI use, ensuring transparency in publications
- > **Agencies should invest in AI capabilities** to stay competitive, as pharma companies seek partnerships for AI-driven innovation



Hackathon activity: *Shaping the future of GPP together*

The future of GPP depends on industry-wide collaboration, particularly in AI integration, patient authorship, RWE, and DEI.

During the Hackathon, attendees identified key areas for refining GPP:

- > **Advancement in AI:** Clear guidelines are needed to define the place of AI in authorship, disclosure requirements, ethical risks, and compliance with confidentiality standards
- > **Defining key metrics:** Traditional metrics may not capture true impact - new benchmarks are needed to assess engagement and effectiveness
- > **The role of social media:** It was felt there is a need for industry-wide guidelines for compliant use of social media
- > **Enhanced patient involvement:** Discussions focused on onboarding materials, compensation guidelines, and whether to integrate patient guidance throughout GPP or in a dedicated section
- > **RWE:** To improve RWE publishing, collaboration with internal stakeholders, early study planning, and dedicated statistical support were recommended
- > **DEI:** Strategies included ensuring inclusive language, increasing regional representation, and holding pharma accountable for diverse authorship.

Insights from the session will be presented to the GPP Steering Committee for future updates.

Sponsored session by HCG: *Finding the story in data—Blending data visualisation, storytelling techniques, and new trends while still upholding core values in medical publications*

Clinical research and the scientific publications landscape are rapidly evolving and expanding, and as communications professionals we need to continually adapt to change. Effective storytelling and visualization can transform complex data into clear, impactful, engaging narratives, without compromising scientific integrity.

Tobias Sturt (AddTwo Digital) used an example of fine art, Bacchus and Ariadne by Renaissance painter Titian, as a way to recontextualise the audience's thinking about charting and information design, helping them approach it with a fresh perspective - to provoke the audience into thinking about data visualization in a whole new way.

Tobias highlighted how visual storytelling enhances comprehension and retention - while numbers present facts, they often lack context and impact. Storytelling and data visualization techniques can make complex data relatable, impactful, and easy to absorb and retain.

Key considerations:

- > **Prioritize and know your audience:** What they know, what will hook them
- > **Identify your key story:** What's important that you want your audience to know, and how to make it interesting and grab your audience's attention. Get buy-in from authors
- > **Create visual structures:** Visuals elevate your story to help navigate complex data
- > **Applying principles in publications:** Ensure that visuals/figures appropriately convey clinical trial data. Explore opportunities to improve storytelling with visuals whilst maintaining scientific rigor



Empowering patient voices in authorship: Navigating barriers and enhancing support

Patient authors bring unique and invaluable perspectives to publications, yet barriers continue to limit their participation, and there is still a feeling of 'tokenism'. In this session, experts from patient advocacy, publishing, and industry discussed the challenges patients face in authorship, from navigating submission processes to lack of mentorship, free time, and limited access to research due to paywalls. Ngawai Moss and Laurence Woollard, both patient advocates, shared their personal experiences, highlighting the need for better support to ensure patients can actively contribute to research without being overwhelmed by the technicalities and processes of publishing.

Key challenges discussed:

- > **Submission process complexity:** Navigating journal formatting, peer review, and revisions can be daunting
- > **Limited mentorship:** Many patient authors lack guidance on handling rejections and feedback. Rejection by a journal can have a huge impact
- > **Time constraints:** Health conditions and family responsibilities often hinder full participation
- > **Financial barriers:** Limited access to research behind paywalls restricts patient engagement

Publishers and industry leaders are beginning to take steps to better integrate patient voices, but inconsistencies remain. Emma Doble (BMJ) highlighted initiatives such as patient advisory panels and dedicated editorial support, which have helped make the submission process more accessible. Rachel Kendrick (AstraZeneca) acknowledged that industry-wide standardization of patient inclusion is still lacking. Compensation for patient authors also remains a contentious issue – some argue for fair payment to recognize their contributions, while others caution against potential bias in industry-funded research.

The session made it clear that while progress has been made, the fundamental barriers facing patient authors remain largely unchanged. To move forward, the panel stressed the importance of collaboration between publishers, industry,

agencies, and advocacy groups to create clear guidelines, mentorship, and fair compensation to empower patient voices more in clinical research and publications.

Key considerations:

- > **Standardized frameworks:** Clear, consistent guidelines for patient authorship across industry and publishing
- > **Improved mentorship:** More-structured support for patient authors throughout the submission process. Patients appreciate the logistical support med comms agencies can provide to navigate submission and resubmission processes
- > **Reimbursement:** A transparent approach to reimbursing patient authors without introducing bias. Clearer guidance may be needed for patients around the educational purposes of publications is for educational purposes, with no commercial incentives
- > **Better recognition:** Authorship tagging that acknowledges contributions without reinforcing tokenism

Member research orals: *Speaking with one voice: An integrated and innovative planning framework for clear and consistent communications (Poster #43)*

Debra Mayo (Otsuka Pharmaceuticals) showcased the findings of an integrated and innovative medical communications planning framework—a collaborative initiative between Otsuka and HCG. Debra highlighted the growing need for integrated medical communications plans (IMCPs) to combat the fragmentation and disconnect often caused by siloed teams. The IMCP centralizes strategy, aligns efforts, and provides clear scientific messaging, enabling teams to work more collaboratively and strategically. Tools such as an Integrated Tactical Plan Dashboard streamline planning, allowing real-time adjustments and highlighting gaps, ultimately ensuring every tactic aligns with broader strategic objectives.



Cross-functional collaboration and data-driven insights are essential for enhancing share of scientific voice (SOSV). By incorporating metrics from sources such as social listening, publications, and medical education, we can ensure communications resonate with stakeholders and create a measurable impact. The future of medical communications lies in breaking down silos and adopting a more integrated, cohesive approach.

Key considerations:

- > Create a collaborative, cross-functional IMCP that ensures each planned tactic across medical affairs and publications is purposeful and supports a consistent scientific narrative
- > Develop tools to increase visibility across functions and achieve the goal of creating a truly integrated strategic plan, ultimately strengthening SOSV
- > Leverage data-driven insights by incorporating real-time metrics

Member proposal: How can we collaborate with authors to integrate AI in publication development?

This session on integrating AI into publication development, hosted by three pharma, agency and publisher panellists and featured audience interaction to gather feedback on experiences and attitudes toward AI at different stages of publications development. Nina Divorty from CMC Connect emphasized the importance of early discussions with authors to ensure alignment with journal guidelines and ethical considerations.

Stephanie Preuss from Springer Nature presented four distinct author personas reflecting different attitudes towards AI:

- > **The Anarchist:** Open to AI but may overlook guidelines
- > **The Anxious:** Concerned about the accuracy and ethics of AI
- > **The Apathetic:** Indifferent to AI; sits on the fence but is agreeable to its use
- > **The Conscious Collaborator:** Informed and cautious, focused on ethical application



James Dathan (AstraZeneca) discussed the need for cautious AI adoption and ethical use, reinforcing the importance of transparency and disclosing negative data when AI is used.

In conclusion, all panellists agreed that as AI becomes a part of the publication process, human oversight, transparency, and accountability will be crucial to ensuring ethical and effective integration. It seems that, over the past year, AI integration in publication development hasn't moved forward significantly. The same challenges around compliance, ethical considerations, and author transparency persist. Authors are ultimately responsible for the publication, so it is essential to obtain their agreement on AI usage and clarify how AI will be integrated into the process.

Key considerations:

- > Engage with authors early to align expectations on the role of AI in content creation
- > Establish ethical AI guidelines, and clarify disclosure requirements for AI-assisted writing
- > Educate stakeholders on AI capabilities and limitations to improve acceptance and responsible adoption



Posters session

This year, ISMPP featured 44 posters with the latest research during the European meeting, covering key trends in AI adoption, patient authorship, freelance medical writing, and strategic medical communications.

[Listen to our podcast](#) to dive deeper into these insights and for an engaging discussion on the various findings from these posters!

Final thoughts

Advancements

ISMPP EU 2025 highlighted significant advancements in patient involvement and AI integration in medical communications. Patients are now seen as equal partners, but they still face barriers such as complex submission processes and financial constraints. Efforts like patient advisory panels and dedicated editorial support have made strides, but standardized frameworks and better support systems are essential for truly empowering patient voices.

Areas needing improvement

AI is being piloted to enhance workflows in medical communications, particularly for systematic literature searches and PLS. However, full implementation in publication submissions and presentations is still in progress. Early communication, transparency, and ethical considerations are crucial for effective AI integration. Integrated medical communications plans are centralizing strategies and fostering cross-functional collaboration, enhancing the overall impact of scientific communications.

Looking forward

Looking ahead, continued collaboration among publishers, industry, agencies, and advocacy groups is vital for refining GPP and ensuring ethical AI use. Embracing data visualization and storytelling techniques will transform complex data into engaging narratives, improving comprehension and retention. By addressing current challenges and seizing new opportunities, the industry can shape a more inclusive, efficient, and impactful future for scientific publications. ■

For more information please contact:



Enda Millar
SVP, Publications Strategy
& Transformation
HCG Publications Powerhouse



hcg-int.com

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