**MVLS Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement**

**Guidelines for a Plain English Summary (PES)**

A plain English summary is a clear, brief summary of the research that has been written for members of the public, rather than researchers or professionals. It should be written clearly and simply, without jargon and with an explanation of any technical terms. Approximately 15% of UK adults have a literacy level at or below that to be expected of 11-year-olds (1). The NIHR Glossary has simple definitions of research terms developed with a panel of researchers and members of the public (2). There are a few simple rules for writing in plain English (3,4,5). In summary these are:

* avoid wherever possible using jargon, abbreviations and technical terms – if you have to use them provide a clear explanation
* avoid complicated English or uncommon words
* use active not passive phrases, for example say ‘we will do it’ rather than ‘it will be done by us’
* keep sentences short
* plan out the order and structure of the summary
* break up the text, for example use bullet lists or headings
* Use bold text to add emphasis but do not use underlining, italics, fancy fonts, all CAPS
* Use of suitable graphics: bar graphs for comparison across groups and pie charts for numerical proportions. Infographics and pictorial representation can also be useful.
* Make it suitable for colour-blind and printer friendly
* ask patients / carers / colleagues to read a draft to find out if anything is unclear

A plain English summary is different from a scientific abstract – please do not cut and paste this or any other part of your study protocol to create a plain English summary.

It is worth noting that the Health Research Authority (HRA) has launched new Quality Standards to improve information given to people who are invited to take part in research (6). The Quality Standards have been launched alongside Design and Review Principles, which include the simple rules for writing in plain English. In December 2023, it will be mandatory for researchers to provide evidence that public, and patients have been involved in the development of the patient information leaflets submitted in REC applications.

**Template for a PES of results**

Information about research should be available to those who take part in the study, interested groups or communities and the public in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. This also makes it easier for health professionals, commissioners, policy makers, and funders to access and use the findings to help make informed decisions and so improve the nation’s health.

The HRA has worked members of the public to develop the following general principles for reporting results in plain English summary (6).

* Study title
* Who carried out the research? (Including details of sponsor, funding and any competing interests)
* What public involvement there was in the study (how many people, what their relevant lived experience was, and what they did)
* Where and when the study took place
* Why was the research needed? Rationale
* What were the main questions studied?
* Who participated in the study or what was the data source?
* What treatments or interventions did the participants take/receive, what did you compare?
* What medical problems (adverse reactions) did the participants have (if appropriate)?
* What happened during the study (methods)?
* What were the results of the study?
* How has this study helped patients and researchers (what will the results be used for)?
* Details of any further research planned
* Where can I learn more about this study?

An NIHR funded study (7) worked with experts and public contributors to develop an illustrated summary of recommendations for improving how review outputs are shared with patients, carers and the public. You may find their infographic helpful when working out how to present your results (Appendix 1).

The Cochrane ‘Dissemination Checklist (8) has 18 things to keep in mind when sharing health evidence and gives these useful tips on communicating numbers

• Always label the numbers you are presenting to indicate what these numbers are referring to [3]. (For instance, refer to “12 out of 100 children”; “3 days per year”; “4 hospital admissions per person”.)

• When presenting outcomes that are measured using scales, describe the range of the scale. Explain what the scale measured and whether a high or a low score is best, if this is not clear.

• Use absolute effects whenever possible. Do not report relative effects (for instance, “a 50% increase”, “a doubling”, “twice as many”) unless you have also reported the absolute effects.

**Other Resources**

1. [What do adult literacy levels mean? | National Literacy Trust](https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/what-do-adult-literacy-levels-mean/)
2. [Glossary | NIHR](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/glossary.htm)
3. [Research transparency - Health Research Authority (hra.nhs.uk)](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/research-transparency/)
4. [Plain English summaries | NIHR](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/plain-english-summaries/27363#resources)
5. [Dissemination essentials: The checklist | Cochrane Training](https://training.cochrane.org/online-learning/knowledge-translation/how-share-cochrane-evidence/dissemination-essentials-checklist)
6. [Improving information for people taking part in research - Health Research Authority (hra.nhs.uk)](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/news-updates/improving-information-people-taking-part-research/)
7. [Writing a plain language (lay) summary of your research findings - Health Research Authority (hra.nhs.uk)](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/best-practice/writing-plain-language-lay-summary-your-research-findings/)
8. [Drawing in the experts! - KMAlliance](https://kmalliance.co.uk/drawing-in-the-experts/)

Appendix 2A poster of a discussion

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