Plain-language summaries (PLS) are increasingly being handled as a tool to improve communication of research to patients, lay audiences (e.g., non-specialist healthcare professionals and time-poor specialists), but they have not yet been embedded and valued as fully accessible. We investigated how this ‘findability’ is handled by biomedical journals.

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective**

How best to embed and value the patient voice in all stages of drug development is a topic currently being embedded in the Good Publication Practice (GPP) guidelines, but this process is still developmentally limited. Plain-language summaries (PLS) are increasingly being handled as a tool to improve communication of research to patients, lay audiences (e.g., non-specialist healthcare professionals and time-poor specialists), but they have not yet been embedded and valued as fully accessible. We investigated how this ‘findability’ is handled by biomedical journals.

**Methods**

The eLIFE list of journals/organisations that produce PLS2 was used to identify a subset of journals. The journals were searched for three months, and the content of all journal articles was reviewed for the presence of PLS. A systematic and robust sampling methodology was chosen for the research. The location of the plain-language summaries was noted as PLS were found in a variety of places, including the body of the journal, a separate section, on the journal website, and on PubMed articles.

**Results**

Among a subset of the few biomedical journals producing PLS, all were noted to develop PLS freely accessible to the public, and all were noted to publish PLS behind a paywall. However, there was wide variation in terminology, requirements, location, and PubMed visibility, meaning that there is no obvious or consistent approach for people to find PLS, a fact that was also evident from the challenges we had to identify a robust sampling methodology for this research.

**Conclusions**

Among a subset of the few biomedical journals that produce PLS, all but one make PLS freely accessible to the public, and none make PLS behind a paywall. However, there was wide variation in terminology, requirements, location, and PubMed visibility, meaning that there is no obvious or consistent approach for people to find PLS, a fact that was also evident from the challenges we had to identify a robust sampling methodology for this research.

**Recommendations**

In order to standardise approaches and optimise reach to the intended audiences we recommend that:

- All journals refer to PLS by this consistent descriptor (plain-language summaries, PLS), particularly to make them easier to search for using standard internet search engines.
- PLS are aggregated with a recognizable icon to help readers locate them easily.
- PLS are developed by authors, although support may be sought by journal editorial staff and/or (patient organisations) to ensure PLS are written appropriately for the intended audience.

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**Disclosure Statement**

The author disclosed the following financial activities: AM has a financial interest in a patient assistant company (Healthbox); KB is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications; CM is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications; MC is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications; CG is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications; MW is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications; HG is a current employee of Complete Medical Communications.

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**Appendix A**

A summary of results is available on the ISMPP.eu website. The full results of the systematic review and a full list of journals and organisations producing PLS are available for download on the ISMPP.eu website.