

Can I Have a Copy of Your Slides?

The lecture is finished, the lights come up, and it is time for questions from the audience. An attendee moves to the microphone in the aisle and says, “Your slides are superb! How can I get a copy so I can use them in the lectures that I present?”

Colleagues of mine tell me that the same thing has happened to them. In some cases, one or two particular slides are sought. In others, attendees are asking speakers for all of the slides, the handout, the bibliography, and anything else they might need, all with the intention of using these materials themselves. These nurses are well intentioned; they want the nurses who were left behind minding the store to receive this wonderful information. They point out that there is no sense in reinventing the wheel—why develop a lecture from scratch when one is already assembled? Many people tell me that they have neither the time nor resources to create a presentation like the one they just heard. Some say that they do not have access to graphics, such as high-quality illustrations or patient photographs, and remind me that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Almost all of the nurses end their requests by saying, “Don’t worry, I will be sure to credit you.”

“Credit” is not what concerns speakers in these situations. Yes, we want our work to be recognized and acknowledged, but several overriding issues are to be considered. First is the issue of ownership. Slides developed by a speaker that contain original material are, in most cases, the property of the speaker. In some instances, a speaker’s slides may be or become the property of his or her employer or the organization or entity sponsoring the presentation or conference. Therefore, it is up to the speaker to protect—or share—the slides and other materials that he or she has created.

A compelling argument for sharing the information can be made. After all, I cannot imagine a speaker anywhere who is opposed to disseminating knowledge to advance nursing practice. The issue is how the information is disseminated. When I attended a national conference recently, a

speaker showed patients’ photographs that I recognized immediately because I had published the photographs in an article I wrote a few years ago. The speaker discussed these patients as if she knew them and presented a great deal of misinformation about them. When I had a chance to talk to the speaker privately, I asked where she obtained the photographs. “I have a confession to make,” she told me with a giggle, “I scanned them from a journal.”

When speakers simply scan photographs from journals and books, import images from Web sites, or pass slides on from person to person, the issues of accuracy and legality arise. Important information can get lost in translation. Over time, a presentation may only remotely resemble the original presentation, even though the same slides are used. Another consideration is copyright infringement. Some speakers unknowingly, or perhaps intentionally, engage in this process when they are seeking content and illustrations to perk up their presentations. Speakers need to be aware that, generally speaking, items that appear in print and electronic forms are copyrighted materials and, as such, require permission for their use. This includes cartoons, greeting cards, diagrams, photographs, tables and figures from journal articles, and information on the Internet. Although items on the Internet are publicly available, they usually are not considered public domain and are protected by copyright. Copyright owners may file a federal lawsuit against anyone who reproduces their work without permission, even in situations where users of the work claim that they attempted to contact or had difficulty locating the owner. Information about copyright law can be found at www.copyright.com, and the procedures to request permission to use copyrighted items can be found in the mastheads of journals, on book publishers’ Web sites, and on the home pages of Web sites.

Another important consideration is privacy and confidentiality with respect to patients’ photographs and medical histories. Patients agree or decline to allow use of their photo-

graphs and accompanying health information for educational purposes only after an in-depth discussion about how the photographs and information will be used. Several patients have openly expressed concern that their photographs “will fall into the wrong hands” and have graciously given me permission to use their photographs with the stipulation that I control and oversee their use. I am obligated to adhere to their wishes.

Many times, after I have explained why I do not distribute my slides upon request, nurses have asked, “So, what do I have to do to have slides like yours?” The short answer is this: Developing a presentation takes time and effort. The process requires searching the literature and other information sources, evaluating the information, assembling the information, and, finally, transforming the information into presentation format. To illustrate key points, consider taking photographs rather than using those taken by others; photographs of friends or family members may work just as well as photographs of patients. Keep a digital or disposable camera on hand in the workplace to document interesting clinical conditions. Ask patients for permission to photograph only the area of interest, and if they agree to be photographed, obtain written consent that details the stipulations of the use of the photographs. Seek permission to use copyrighted materials, such as photographs and illustrations that have been published in print or electronically. Finally, think about why you wanted a certain speaker’s slides in the first place. What made them so appealing? Was it the layout of the slides, the way the information was presented, or the speaker’s ability to “teach and not preach?” Whatever the case, these are concepts that you can integrate when developing your own presentation. There is no need to ask for copies of a speaker’s slides.

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