Top tips for writing an MSF Scientific Days abstract

An abstract is a short summary of your work. Think of it as a snapshot that explains the problem you addressed, what you did, what you found, and why it matters.

Your abstract is often the first thing reviewers will read, and it helps determine whether your work is selected for MSF Scientific Days. Take the time to make it clear, concise, and engaging.

Remember: impactful abstracts are not limited to formal research studies. Operational experiences, programme innovations, quality improvement work, and lessons learned from implementation can all make valuable contributions to Scientific Days.

We would love to see more submissions from those of you in MSF projects and early on in your careers. Often a lack of confidence in writing can stop valuable contributions from being submitted so don't be put off! Before you start writing think about:

- What is the main message I want people to remember?
- What is new, interesting, or useful about this work?
- What does this add to existing knowledge or practice?
- Why does it matter for patients, programmes, operations, policy, or research?

A simple structure You can use a traditional structure:
Background- Methods-Results- Conclusions

Or you can organise your abstract using headings such as:
Problem/purpose- Approach-Key findings- Significance.

There is no single correct format. The most important thing is to communicate your key messages clearly. Further guidance for MSF Scientific Days abstracts can be found here

Key sections

Title: Often overlooked, the title is vital in telling the reader what to expect. It is the first thing reviewers and attendees will see and should spark interest and be clear. Try to avoid technical jargon and acronyms.

Background/Problem: Briefly explain the problem, challenge, or context. Example: Understanding healthcare workers' experiences of providing care during a cholera outbreak

in conflict-affected Sudan. A clear problem statement helps readers quickly understand the importance of your work.

Methods/Approach: This should give readers enough information to understand how the findings were generated and assess their reliability. Describe what was done, including:

- Where and when the work took place
- What type of work it was, for example, research study (and study design) programme evaluation, quality improvement project?
- Who participated and who was included? (e.g. patients, community members, healthcare workers, project sites)
- How was the information collected and analysed?

Results/Key findings: Present the most important findings. Be as specific as possible and include numbers where appropriate or main themes/insights identified. Less useful: Viral suppression improved significantly. Better: Viral suppression increased from 68% to 84%. Focus on the findings that best support your main message. Don't forget to include denominators and time frames.

Conclusions/Significance: Explain what the findings mean and why people should care about them. Consider: How the findings could improve patient care, how they could inform programmes or operations and whether they have implications for policy, practice, or future research. You can include one line on limitations here.

Tips for a stronger abstract

- Be clear and concise, don't pack in every detail!
- Focus on results, include numbers and focus on most important results
- Be honest about limitations
- Show operational relevance
- Use language that is easy to understand

Common pitfalls/ things to avoid

- Listing activities instead of outcomes
- Too much background
- Conclusions not supported by results
- Missing key data
- Not sticking to word counts and other important guidance. For scientific days the guidance is here

What makes a great Scientific Days abstract? A strong abstract addresses an important challenge, includes clear methods, presents specific findings, demonstrates relevance for MSF or humanitarian practice, and is written in accessible language.

Final checks before submitting

- Is the main message clear? Have I described what was done?
- Have I included the most important results? Have I explained why the findings matter?
- Could a colleague unfamiliar with this topic easily understand the key messages?

Good luck!