

Editorial : Issues Related to Authorship

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GENERAL

With advancements in telecommunication, information can be disseminated more rapidly and effectively. Many journals especially those that allow online access are providing additional channels for articles or reports to be published rapidly. Many scientists and researchers are very keen to be listed as authors for various reasons. However, credit of authorship come with many responsibilities, especially in biomedical publications. It is therefore important for those who intend to publish their work to understand their roles as authors.

WHO QUALIFIES TO BE AN AUTHOR?

In 1985, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) published criteria that define authorship. According to the report, an author should have contributed substantially to conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, of the study. Although it may not be possible for an author to be involved in all aspects of a study (biostatistical analysis, technical calibration of monitoring devices, etc.) he or she should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content. Acquisition of funding, collection of data or general supervision of the research alone, does not justify authorship. All authors must approve the manuscript before publication and vouch for its validity. More recently, another aspect of authorship has been recommended. This is based on level and area of contribution towards the study and preparation of the article. Some major biomedical journals have adopted this model and require all the authors to describe exactly their functional role in the project. This "contributor ship" model can be used to complement the original ICMJE criteria.

NUMBER AND ORDER OF AUTHORS

Multiple authors may be necessary, especially in studies involving large samples or multiple centres. However, if the number of authors is unusually large in relation to the scope and complexity of the study, an editor reserves the right to request for detailed description of the contributions of individual authors. A corresponding author should be responsible for the integrity of the article, submission of the article, receiving reviews and communication with the other authors. There is no exact guideline on the order of

authorship, and the decision should be made by all the authors. The readers cannot know and should not assume the meaning of order unless it is described.

UNDESIRABLE TYPES OF AUTHORSHIP

All those who fulfill the ICMJE criteria should be recognized authors. Those who do not qualified to be authors but have contributed to the study or preparation of the manuscript, should be acknowledged in the article. Occasionally, we come across some undesirable practices in authorship status, and which can generally be classified into three types. **Guest authors** have not made significant contribution to the article content but are included to improve the chances of an article to be published. **Honorary authors also have not made significant contribution but** are included based solely on their position in an institution or organization in which the study is conducted. **Ghost authorships** may lie behind publication of articles where those actually involved in the work are not listed as authors. These contributors may be paid for their services or are employed by organizations or commercial firms to conduct the study.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN AUTHOR

The author should ensure that the article is submitted in accordance in the format or style recommended by a journal. Failure to do so will result in unnecessary delay as these technical shortcomings will hamper the editorial process. Authors should also clearly indicate their family and personal names or state their preference on how their names should be cited. This helps in the indexing process and encourages authors to develop a consistent naming style in their publication careers.

Authors are also responsible for adhering to ethical principles in the conduct of their studies. For clinical studies involving human subjects, the study should have been approved by the institutional review board (medical ethics committee) or comply with the Declaration of Helsinki. The privacy of research subjects and confidentiality of personal data must be upheld in all publications, or else specific consent must be obtained for the publication of identifiable information. Studies involving animals should be approved by relevant animal care committees and follow approved protocol.

The author should also disclose sources of funding and any potential conflict of interest during the conduct of the study. Most journals would require the corresponding author to provide a cover letter to state the originality of the content and transfer of copyright to the publisher. Some journals (including Malaysian Orthopaedic Journal) further require that this document be signed by all who are listed as authors.

All these measures serve to uphold the authenticity and high standard of the material published and safeguard the interest of readers. This is of particular importance for medical and health science journals, as readers may adopt the recommendations or conclusions of published studies and apply them to their clinical practice.

REFERENCES

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