

## Editorial

# Authorship in biomedical research: authors have to take the public responsibility



Authorship rights and duties have to be understood as multidimensional concern. Publication ethics affect authors, researchers, principle investigator, senior person in institutions, editors, and publisher. But unethical behavior on authorship may have direct impact on the health and welfare of patients; in addition, such a performance may compromise the safety of participants in clinical trials and experimental settings.

Editors play a central part in the enforcement of the publication guidelines, established by the so-called Vancouver Group at a convention in 1978, Vancouver, British Columbia. An international committee (ICMJE International Committee of Medical Journal Editors) aroused from this first meeting, and developed the *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication* [3]. These rules of action have been updated on a regular base.

Persons, who are listed and mentioned as authors on a submitted manuscript, have to fulfill and meet all three of the following criteria [2, 3]:

- 1) Substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data or analysis and interpretation of data
- 2) Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content
- 3) Final approval of the version to be published.

The ICMJE determines negative criteria for persons, who should not be mentioned as authors [3]:

- Acquisition of funding, collection of data, or general supervision of the research group, alone, does not justify authorship
- All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed
- Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.

A supervisory position, providing funding, involvement in patient care or providing patient samples, routine technical work, proofreading or editing of manuscripts or providing laboratory space or uses of instrumentation do not qualify individuals for authorship [2]. Persons, who do not meet the

authorship criteria, but should be credited, have to be mentioned in the acknowledgment section. Name, position, institution, and the completed contribution to the research project should be mentioned here.

Different authorship categories (honorary, gift, ghost, and guest) spook in the publication community, but all of them have to be considered as unethical publication practice [1].

### Honorary authors

In such a situation, the ICJME criteria are not met, but a person is mentioned as author mainly because of the reputation. Such gratuitous authorships should be considered as non-honorable.

### Gift authors

Gift authors normally do not fulfill the ICJME criteria, but may occupy a position such as mentors, directors, and chairs. They may be involved in the general set up of the research unit, but do not contribute to the reported trial.

### Ghost authors

There are two possibilities of a ghost authorship: first, persons, who made a substantial contribution to the trial, are not listed as authors, although the criteria of authorship are fulfilled; second, persons, who are often professional writers and paid by a commercial sponsor. Although such writers do not meet the criteria for an authorship, they have to be mentioned in the acknowledgment section, especially with a conflict of interest statement. Editors, who received a manuscript, should check, if a potential author is not mentioned by a written statement of all authors.

### Guest authors

Guest authors have not contributed to the research project, but are known as experts in the explored field of interest. Such persons are asked for co-authorship hoping for a simpler submission process and accelerated peer process. Apparently, publication ethics are jeopardized by such practices.

Publication ethics are an important and notable rationale in biomedical science. The welfare of patients and participants in clinical trials and research projects are based, not only, but to a great part on these principles. An author should know the liability. Each author listed on a manuscript has to take the full public responsibility of the reported research results.

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### Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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