

*The Newsletter for Journal Publishers*

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### **Authorship and Guidelines**

*By Gary Michael Smith*

*Chatgris Press*

The issue of authorship has been of concern to journal editors and publishers for some time. Consequently, the continued practice of listing numerous individuals as the author constantly needs to be verified, especially when it is explained that certain individuals really had no "substantive contribution" as is mandated in the instructions but rather "they need their name on a paper for academic reasons" or they procured lab equipment and supplies. Such explanations should alert editors that certain individuals should more appropriately be listed in the acknowledgments.

Although the editorial office may be responsible for ensuring a fair and swift peer review, editors can attempt to maintain standards by incorporating guidelines for a variety of contingencies into author's instructions. And this issue appears to have interest to others as well, as is evidenced by the publication of such texts as *The Author's Guide to Biomedical Journals* (New York: Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., 1997). Not long ago, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* developed an authorship statement requiring signature by all authors<sup>1</sup>. Also, journals may request in their writer's guidelines that authors "conform to 'Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals.'<sup>2</sup>"

Additionally, in the initial acknowledgment of the receipt letter, an editor may request more information as needed, such as detailed delineation of the responsibilities of all authors if more than four are listed, or if one or more are added during the review process before a final decision is made regarding acceptance of the submission. If this information is not provided in the transmittal letter accompanying the submission, the acknowledgment of the receipt letter can include a paragraph to serve as a reminder, such as the following:

"Additionally, in an effort to reduce the number of authors listed on your title page, (Name of Journal) mandates in the first paragraph of the instructions to authors adherence with the *New England Journal of Medicine's* Special Report regarding 'Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals.' These requirements concern qualifications substantiating authorship for scientific papers. In addition to criteria listed for authorship (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1997;336(4):30915), it should be noted that 'Participation solely in the acquisition of funding or the collection of data . . . general supervision of the research group . . . does not justify authorship.' Consequently, you may want to consider removing from your list of authors those names in this category."

If the lead author chooses to follow the suggestion for shortening the list of authors, a request should be made for the signatures of those removed, whether they are moved to the acknowledgment section or removed altogether, in an attempt to prevent litigious consequences: "Editorial policy dictates that changes regarding author status be accompanied by the appropriate signature confirming knowledge of the change. Please have (Name) sign the statement below and return by fax this letter to the editorial office so your manuscript can be processed for publication. Be aware that your paper will not be further processed until the editorial office receives this confirmation. Thank you for your prompt attention to this requirement."

I confirm that I am aware that my name  
was removed (moved) from the list of  
authors (to the acknowledgment section)  
on manuscript (number), "(title)."

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Editors of peer-reviewed journals should look closely at incorporating such steps in an effort to improve the status of true authorship.

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<sup>1</sup>Lundberg, G., Glass, R. What Does Authorship Mean in a Peer-Reviewed Medical Journal? JAMA. 1996;276(1):75.

<sup>2</sup>International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Special report: uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals. N Engl J Med. 1997 Jan 23;336(4):30915.