EDITORIAL

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Missues of Authorship - Editors View

Izet Masic

Ethics is a philosophical discipline and present set of customs, habits and norms, by which people of one community manage their actions and their overall behavior. Ethical behavior and ethical norms have a great impact on scientific publications, and the goal of each magazine, especially the Editorial Board of journal, and Editors themselves, are to follow the ethical behavior principles in all steps of publishing (from the design of the study to the final process of publication). The list of authors is written below the title, along with the statement who is the corresponding author.

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The issue of authorship and the person who meets the criteria to be in the author's list is defined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJ). ICMJE suggests that the role of the author must be followed by four criteria (2):

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work;
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content;
- Final approval of the version to be published; and
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved (Figure 1a-1e).

Author is person who meets these four criteria. Contributors who meet fewer than all 4 of the above criteria for authorship should not be listed as authors, but they should be acknowledged (2). In medical practice, especially in developing countries, there are frequent misuses of authorships:

- often heads of departments and professors are on the list of authors even when they did not contribute to the article, so they become gift authors (they are on the author list because of some favors - it does not have to be financial),
- often for some reason one of the authors is removed from the article, although he made his contribution so he is considered as ghost author,
- author who is famous in the specific field has been added as author so he becomes a guest author in order to increase the rating of the article, and sometimes he does not know that he is even signed (3).

Practice in developing countries, in a hospitals, clinics or departments, is that authors sign themselves systematically and they raise the quantity, and sometimes other scientometric indicators. For example, an assistant at Department X, although he is the only author, he signs two assistant

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Figure 1 (1.1. - 1.5). Author's contribution Form need to be submitted via DBMS (signed by all co-authors of the paper)

professors and two full professors, although they did not give contribution to article. The next step is that one of the assistant professors signs the mentioned assistant, and then the full professors return the favor, creating a false picture of the work of an author. Scientometric analysis includes both authorship and co-authorship for evaluation and ranking, but we need to find distinction between authorship and co-authorship. This particularly applies to international collaborations, which make a fake picture of the work of an author. Is it realistic that 50-100 authors are on a multicenter study? Is it realistic that 8-10 people are in a small study, which included 50 patients and have a clinical character? During 2016, 73 original articles were published in Medical Archives. In 23.2% of cases the article was written by four authors (most common), in 2.7% of cases article was written by one author, while in 5.4% cases article was written by eight authors (maximal number of authors on author list during 2016) (Figure 2). Also, 24 case reports were published, while the most common were articles with four and five authors (both 20.8%) (Figure 3). The fact is that authorships are often abused, and are a subject of numerous manipulations. People generally lie about authorship in two ways: by putting down the names of people who took little or no part in the research and by leaving out the names of people who took part (3). The exact percentage of violations of ethical rules about authorship is difficult to figure out, although an informal conversation indicates that the number is high (Wisslar et al. suggest that prevalence of articles with honorary

Figure 1. Number of articles (original articles) in Medical Archives according to number of authors

Figure 2. Number of articles (case reports) in Medical Archives according to number of authors

authorship, ghost authorship, or both, was 21.0%, a decline from 29.1% in 1996 in six general medicine journal with high impact factor) (4). How to solve this problem is a good question, but imperative is education of the scientific community to develop the culture of ethical authorship and to develop awareness of the fairness of this process (5, 6). Editors have a role to clearly define question of authorship in article and real contribution, but nevertheless the main role is still in the hand of researchers who write the article, and who should still know how to appreciate what they do, and not to give someone their work and merits. The fact is that the awareness of the heads of the organization should be influenced, and that they have to know, regardless of their position, they do not deserve place among the co-authors, if they did not really contribute, according to ICMJE guidelines.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

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