



Who Cares about Authorship Rules?

Editors Do, Authors and Candlestick Makers Might, Readers Do Not

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Last July, George Lundberg and Richard Glass published an editorial (1) in *JAMA* describing their journal's policy on authorship and the recently reaffirmed statement on authorship by the International Committee of Medical Journals Editors (ICMJE). The ICMJE statement contained 1 modification: "Editors may ask authors to describe what each contributed; this information may be published" (1). The *JAMA* editorial was written partly in response to discussion that occurred during the ICMJE's annual meeting, which was held 2 days after a conference on authorship was convened by Richard Horton (from *The Lancet*) and Richard Smith (from the *British Medical Journal*) in Nottingham (2,3). At Nottingham, editorial pundits criticized the ICMJE authorship criteria as being impractical, too rigid, and largely unknown by biomedical authors, at least on 1 side of the Atlantic.

In their editorial, Lundberg and Glass

explained that, although agreement on the criteria for authorship was not unanimous among the editors attending the ICMJE meeting, consensus was reached. Recognizing that some editors, including Drummond Rennie (another *JAMA* editor), believe that change is still needed, Lundberg and Glass invited readers and authors to submit their views on the usefulness of the ICMJE statement on authorship. Few responses were received, and those that came in reflected a disappointing range of attitudes—unfocused ambivalence to concerned concurrence.

Two replies were published in the correspondence column of a subsequent issue of *JAMA*. Both letters agreed with the principles of the ICMJE criteria. The author of 1 of the letters explained how he uses and enforces the ICMJE criteria in his role as a managing editor (4). The other letter suggested that the criteria be modified to allow computer programmers to be listed as authors (5). Lundberg and Glass (6) replied that anyone who meets the 3 criteria for authorship is an author regardless of their job title. Here, care should be taken to avoid

a narrow interpretation of the 1st ICMJE criteria "conception and design; or analysis and interpretation of data". A programmer might easily be part of analysis and interpretation. As long as a programmer, or even a baker or candlestick maker, also meet the 2nd and 3rd criteria (drafting or critically revising the article and approving the final version to be published), they are entitled to authorship. Ⓣ

References

1. Lundberg GD, Glass, RM. What does authorship mean in a peer-reviewed medical journal? *JAMA* 1996;276:75.
2. Horton R, Smith R. Time to redefine authorship: a conference to do so. *Br Med J* 1996;312:723.
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Collaborative Research Seminar on Ethical Issues in Biomedical Publication

Anne Hudson Jones and Faith McLellan convened a collaborative research seminar sponsored by the Institute for the Medical Humanities of The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) from 27 February to 2 March 1997. The goal of the seminar was to plan and shape a book that deals with ethical issues in biomedical publication.

The collaborative research seminar is a model developed at the Institute in 1983 and followed with considerable success in ensuing years, producing a series of books published by university presses. Once a topic of importance has been identified, the conveners invite participants to write essays for the book. The drafts are circulated in advance of the meeting; each participant is assigned another person's chapter to critique. During a 2 1/2-day meeting in Galveston, the group discusses the conceptual framework of the book and refines the focus of each essay to avoid undesirable overlap and to ensure that each chapter contributes to the overall coherent vision of the whole work.


Participants, in addition to Jones and McLellan, were Craig Bingham (*Medical Journal of Australia*), Addeane S Caelleigh (*Academic Medicine*), Susan Eastwood (Uni-

versity of California, San Francisco), Annette Flanagin (*JAMA*), Paul J Friedman (University of California, San Diego), Barbara Gastel (Texas A & M University), Fiona Godlee (*British Medical Journal*), C K Gunsalus (University of Illinois), Richard Horton (*The Lancet*), Edward J Huth (Editor Emeritus, *Annals of Internal Medicine*), and Debra Parrish (Titus & McConomy).

The 1st section of the book outlines the major issues and problem areas. Friedman's chapter sets publication against the wider backdrop of scientific misconduct. Jones and Horton explore concepts of authorship, Huth discusses the problems of repetitive publication, and Flanagin addresses conflict of interest. Godlee reviews the process of traditional peer review, while Bingham describes new models of peer review arising from the development of electronic journals. Gastel's chapter focuses on the impact of culture on ethical practices in publication, and McLellan assesses the ethical challenges posed by electronic publication.

The 2nd section of the book responds to the issues outlined earlier. Parrish gives a legal perspective on the issues, while Gunsalus describes how institutions can develop policies to avert legal remedies. Eastwood gives a model for educating the trainees in

ethical biomedical publication. In the final chapter, Caelleigh identifies ways to educate those in leadership positions to bring about systemic change in the ways these issues are addressed. Although this book is not intended to be a how-to manual, a 3rd section includes important documents and practical guidelines for determining authorship and describing the mechanics of the peer-review process.

The idea for this project emerged from the experiences Jones and McLellan have had in teaching about publication ethics as part of the federally mandated course in research ethics at UTMB. They discovered a wide gap between what journal editors believe researchers know about publication practices and what researchers really know. Even when researchers are aware of certain publication standards, they often do not understand the origin or importance. A resource book that explores the conceptual basis and historical development of guidelines regarding ethical practice in biomedical publication will help close this gap. The book is aimed at a wide audience, including investigators, research trainees, and administrators. Publication is anticipated in 1998. 

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