

◆ Ode to Multiauthorship: A Multicentre, Prospective Random Poem

Sir—All cases complete, the study was over
the data were entered, lost once, and
recovered.

Results were greeted with considerable glee
p value (two-tailed) equaling 0.0493.
The severity of illness, oh what a discovery,
was inversely proportional to the chance of
recovery.

When the paper's first draft had only begun
the wannabe authors lined up one by one.
To jockey for their eternal positions
(for who would be first, second, and third)
and whom "et aled" in all further citations.

Each centre had seniors, each senior ten
bees,
the bees had technicians and nurses to
please.

The list it grew longer and longer each day,
as new authors appeared to enter the fray.
Each fought with such fury to stake his or
her place

just a "participant" would be a dis-
grace.

For the appendix is piled high with hun-
dreds of others
and seen by no one but spouses and
mothers.

If to "publish or perish" is how academics are
bred

then to miss the masthead is near to be dead.
As the number of authors continued to grow
they outnumbered the patients by two to
one or so.

While PIs faxed memos to company head-
quarters
the bees and the nurses took care of the
orders.

They'd signed up the patients, and followed
them weekly
heard their complaints, and kept casebooks
so neatly.

There were seniors from centres that
enrolled two or three
who threatened "foul play" if not on the
marquee.

But the juniors and helpers who worked into
the night

were simply "acknowledged" or left off out-
right.

"Calm down" cried the seniors to the
quivering drones
there's place for you all on the RPU clones.
When the paper was finished and sent for
review

six authors didn't know that the study was
through.

Oh the work was so hard, and the fights oh
so bitter
for the glory of publishing and grabbing the
glitter.

Imagine the wars when in six months or
better

The Editor's response, "please make it a
letter."

The order of the authors is not necessarily
related to specific contributions, but to the
order in which each made their acquaintance
with the first author. However, all have made
significant contributions to the poem. The
authors acknowledge their debt to Theodore
Geisel. This letter was originally submitted
to *The Lancet* as an article.

RPU = repeating publishable unit; PI = prin-
cipal investigator

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DEPARTMENT OF
PONDEROUS PROSE

*Can you translate the passage below into
simple English?*

Even with the most sophisticated experi-
mental protocol, it is exceedingly unlike-
ly that the capacity to perform novel
feats of legerdemain can be instilled in a
superannuated canine.

(Answer on page 155)

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"Just because specialists
can read material with a
Fog Index of 20 doesn't
mean they want to."

—Roy Peter Clark, in
The Editorial Eye