

Authorship Task Force Holds Third Retreat, Concludes Activities

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Increasingly in recent years, biomedical journals have required that papers not only list authors but also specify individual authors' contributions. The third CSE authorship retreat, held 7 May 2001 in conjunction with the CSE annual meeting, focused mainly on experience thus far with such "contributorship". Afterward, the CSE Authorship Task Force, which had organized the retreat, said so much progress had been made that the task force no longer was needed. Accordingly, CSE has now disbanded the task force.

Editors' Experience

Task Force Chair Drummond Rennie, of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and the University of California, San Francisco, introduced and moderated the approximately 3-hour retreat. A strong advocate of contributorship, he expressed the hope for "a rout" rather than "a retreat".

Discussion began with accounts by two editors whose journals had pioneered contributorship: Richard Horton, of *The Lancet*, and Frank Davidoff, of *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Horton confirmed that publishing lists of individuals' contributions is feasible and imparts important information. He noted that the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has now endorsed describing in print the contribution of each author (see www.icmje.org). He also observed that specifying contributions to multicenter clinical trials can raise complex issues.

Davidoff said that traditionally editors have been "hawks" about fully describing experimental methods but "dweebs" about transparency regarding authorship. He said

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contributorship is "an idea whose time has come" but not an entirely new idea: A German paper from about a century ago stated the contributions of the authors. Davidoff noted some decisions that *Annals of Internal Medicine* faced in instituting contributorship—for example, whether to request the information on submission or on acceptance of a paper, whether to request it only for reports of original research or also for other submissions, and whether to have prespecified categories of contribution or allow authors to use free text. Davidoff said authors have not objected to stating their contributions.

Editors of five other journals then briefly discussed their experience. Anthony Proto, of *Radiology*, presented findings suggesting that the proportion of authors meeting the ICMJE criteria for authorship has increased since authors have been required to state their contributions. Phil Fontanarosa, of *JAMA*, described an instance in which collecting contributorship data led to fuller disclosure—a report of an industry-sponsored study listed only an employee of the company as responsible for data management, but questioning revealed that others also had been involved.

Leslie Neistadt, of the *Journal of Athletic Training*, said that because papers in this journal generally have four or fewer authors, information about contributions can easily appear after the authors' names and thus receive more attention than if it appeared at the end of a paper. Laura Garwin, of *Nature*, said that submitting contributorship information is voluntary at this journal and that authors have shown little interest in doing it. Sandra Goldbeck Wood, of the *British Medical Journal*, summarized data from this journal's experience; she concluded that current practice for determining authorship diverges considerably from the ICMJE criteria and that perhaps descriptive rather than prescriptive criteria should be developed.

Other Perspectives

Invited participants from academe, industry, and government then made comments. Bioethicist Ruth Fischbach, of Columbia University and previously of the National Institutes of Health, noted that authorship was the "coin of the realm" in academe and discussed aspects of authorship by federal employees. She also identified issues for relatively junior persons from abroad doing research in the United States. Such researchers can be vulnerable, and care must be taken to ensure that their contributions are recognized; also, researchers from some countries face pressure to be a first author before returning home.

Elizabeth Wager, recently of Glaxo-SmithKline, explored implications of contributorship for large industry-funded studies. Among the benefits she listed were greater recognition of scientists from industry, increased awareness of often unrecognized roles (for example, those of professional writers), and a published contribution record that can aid in, for example, deciding whom to hire.

Mary Scheetz, of the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Research Integrity, expressed support for standardizing journal instructions to authors with regard to authorship information. She said, however, that the standardization must be developed by the research community, not by the government.

Sheldon Kotzin, of the National Library of Medicine, said the average number of authors per article listed in MEDLINE had nearly doubled over the last few decades, from 2.09 in 1966-1974 to 3.92 in 1997-2000. He reported that beginning in 2001, MEDLINE no longer is limiting the number of authors listed per article. After noting the benefits of listing contributions, he said that standardized categories would be needed "for bibliographic control". He also said that journals requiring contributorship information might be viewed with

particular favor when seeking inclusion in MEDLINE. He noted, however, that adding new types of information to MEDLINE itself would require time and money. For clarity, he suggested that journals print authors' surnames in boldface type or otherwise distinguish them from authors' given names.

Monica Bradford, of *Science*, said this journal does not require listing the roles of contributors. She said concern had been expressed that listing contributors could lead to a move away from joint responsibility for a paper as a whole.

David Korn, of the Association of American Medical Colleges, said that contributorship is a good idea "but not a panacea". Particular challenges are being posed, he said, by the move from small, "cottage-industry" science to big-science projects spanning various laboratories and disciplines and having multiple leaders. Conventional structures are experiencing stresses, he said, because biomedical science is changing.

Open discussion followed. Several points were raised. Perceptions of authorship differ among cultures. Authorship order has different meanings in different fields of science. Contributorship can be used to recognize persons who are not doing traditional science but are contributing to research—for example, indigenous people providing information about plant pharmaceuticals.

The End

As the end of the retreat approached, Horton observed that several such meetings on authorship had been held and that the discussion was becoming repetitive and returns were diminishing. For much further

Some CSE Resources on Authorship

From the Authorship Task Force

Authorship: a selected bibliography. Leash E. *CBE Views* 1998;21(4):133-4.

Authorship Task Force. www.councilscienceeditors.org/services_ATF.shtml.

Authors-contributors in biological sciences: who takes responsibility for what? how does the reader know? *CBE Views* 1999;22(1):11. [Annual meeting report.]

Authorship: readers come first. Bailar JC III. *CBE Views* 1999;22(1):24. [Letter.]

Who's the author? Problems with biomedical authorship, and some possible solutions. Davidoff F, for the Task Force on Authorship. *Science Editor* 2000;23(4):111-9.

Authorship conference accompanies annual meeting. Gastel B. *CBE Views* 1999;22(5):157-8.

Views afield: the desserts and the deserts of authorship. *Science Editor* 2000;23(2):53-4.

Other Items, 1997-2001

Focus issue: criteria for authorship of scientific papers. *CBE Views* 1997;20(4). [Issue contains a variety of pieces about authorship.]

Solution corner: lead-author responsibility. *CBE Views* 1997;20(6):199-200.

How do we bring authorship out of the bedroom? Tarnow E. *Science Editor* 2000;23(6):183-4.

Scientific authorship and more? Carpe diem, CBE. Tacker M. *CBE Views* 1998;21(4):111-2.

Culture of science and order of authorship. Altus MS. *Science Editor* 2001;24(1):17. [Letter.]

Authorship discussion gains momentum at CBE retreat. Tacker M. *CBE Views* 1998;21(4):131-2.

CSE journal editors' convocation addresses peer review, authorship. Pritchard HK. *Science Editor* 2001;24(2):51-3.

progress to be made, he said, leaders in academe must take the next steps.

Rennie expressed agreement and said that this CSE retreat on authorship probably would be the last. After the retreat, he reported to the CSE Board of Directors that the work of the Authorship Task Force had "largely been completed". As Rennie recommended, CSE has now disbanded the

task force, which was established in 1998.

Reports by the task force remain available, as do summaries of Council activities on authorship. For information about CSE resources on authorship, please see the accompanying sidebar. 