

## Editorial

# Authorship in journal articles: A concern

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Publication is of paramount importance for the progress of science. All research must be published and everyone wants to be included in the authorship byline. However, many do not update themselves regarding the ethics and guidelines in this regard. The purpose of this editorial is to bring to light certain issues related to authorship.

Who are qualified to be authors? The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has clear guidelines on the subject and we all should follow this: <sup>[1]</sup>

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work AND
2. Drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content, AND
3. Final approval of the version to be published, AND
4. 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.

Although, it is very clear that authors should fulfil all the four criteria mentioned above, this aspect has to be decided by the research group and the institution involved as per the ICMJE guidelines. The research group should also ensure that researchers who qualify on the basis of these criteria are not left out. Most of the journals get a declaration signed by all the authors saying that 'those who fulfil the criteria have been included in the author's list and none of them have been left out.' The order of authorship should be based on the amount of contribution of each author. One author has to be necessarily earmarked for correspondence. Not following these guidelines amounts to dishonesty and publication misconduct. Honesty is the basis of any research; hence, it should not be breached at any point of time.

How is the authorship issue tackled? Sometimes complaints are received by the journal editors regarding non-inclusion of certain names in the author's byline. It is noticed that most of the journal editors do not get involved in redressal of this issue.

The complainants are directed to approach their institution and research group to sort out these issues based on the authorship criteria. It should be made very clear that those who do not fulfill all the four criteria are not entitled to be authors of the article but their names should appear in the acknowledgement mentioning their part of the contribution. Honorary authorship is quite prevalent and includes 'gift authors' and 'guest authors.' Gift authors are usually departmental heads or persons in the department who are included as authors, for some favours of the past or future. Similarly, guest authorship is the inclusion of some famous influential person with the idea of either adding value to the work or increasing the chances of publication. In 2008, 18% of authors were found to be honorary authors in six major journals. <sup>[2]</sup> Sometimes 'coercive authorship' is also noticed wherein names of senior researchers are included without sufficient contribution from them. 'Ghost authorship' is also prevalent where the names do not appear in the list, in spite of sufficient contribution from them which leads to frustration and dissatisfaction.

It has been noticed that the number of authors per article has increased in recent decades. <sup>[3]</sup> It has also been noticed that the average number of authors increased from 1.9 before 1975 to 5.9 during 2015 to 2019. <sup>[4]</sup>

I am sure the authors will take cognizance of these criteria while submitting their papers for publication in 'Global Journal of Cataract Surgery and Research in Ophthalmology.'

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