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PUBLICATION ETHICS – WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

Part 1: Authorship: Attribution without hesitation, deviation or repetition

For a novice writer the greatest challenge (beyond that of the actual writing) can be negotiating the list of authors. This can be a great source of hesitation and anxiety: who to include (or exclude), and in what order? The old chestnut of the head of department who has to be included on every paper still lives in a few departments; authorship order (not an easy or obvious choice in nursing) can be confounded where medical and allied health collaborators import their different expectations. Guidelines for authorship and contributorship from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE 2016) go a long way towards resolving these dilemmas for authors, by providing a consensus statement indicating that a named author is someone who should have provided:

- ‘Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- 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’ (ICMJE 2016).

This can provide clarity, but the topic still needs to be broached early enough and bravely enough. The Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE; Albert & Wager 2003) also offer help.

For publishers, authorship issues are perennial; if the problem isn’t one of guest, ghost or gift authorship (all ways in which the actual writer of a manuscript can be obscured, leaving the editor and reviewers little idea who *really* is the author), then it is authors deviating from the original author list: adding, removing or reordering individuals, particularly from large author groups, at very late stages and even post-publication. Once again COPE offer help, in the form of a series of flowcharts that map reasoned responses (at <http://publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts>).

Naming the author(s) is not the whole story: the authorship may be appropriately assigned but still a problem if the authors are recycling material which they have already published elsewhere. What constitutes prior publication can be one issue – in an age where a lot of material previously not freely or electronically available has become so – such as conference abstracts and theses. New forms have also arisen, including individual websites, blogs, vlogs and self-publication. There is no standard for what comprises prior publication; COPE recommends the author consult the editor before / at submission of any manuscript where content may already be in the public domain by some means, and this will be the topic of an editorial for a forthcoming issue.

Whilst prior publication seems innocuous, it poses an issue in relation to obtaining blind review for the manuscript. If it is the policy of the journal (as it is for the *International Journal of Nursing Practice*) that reviewers should be blinded to the author to minimise risk of bias and conflict of interest, prior publication poses relative disadvantage for the manuscript.

Most times this sort of repetition, whilst self-plagiarism, seems unwitting and unintentional; a result of writing multiple papers on the same topic or repeated use of similar methods, and

developing 'pet phrases' of expression. Non-authorship is a less common and more serious issue. Wikipedia defines plagiarism as 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own', and plagiarism and self-plagiarism were issues even for Shakespeare (although he may not have thought about it quite the same way). Today, it is 'hot' issue, with, at one extreme, papers for sale; at the other, the widespread use of software such as iThenticate™ Crosscheck™ and Turnitin™ makes it easy for editors to track duplicate publishing, but no less hard to appraise motivation. Most times self-plagiarism seems unintentional; plagiarising others' work can be equally innocent - where a study is being (needfully) replicated, duplication of text may be inadvertent, or in ignorance of this as academic dishonesty, particularly where authors are not academics. However, it may also be literary theft, and whatever the intention, copyright violation can be a problem. The advice to authors is always to review their work with care to ensure they can be confident in their declaration of no prior publication, and to discuss any queries with the editor.

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Albert T, Wager E. How to handle authorship disputes: a guide for new researchers. The COPE Report 2003; at <http://publicationethics.org/files/u2/2003pdf12.pdf>

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. Dec 2016. At <http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>