

EDITORIAL

[Translated article] Responsible authorship

[Artículo traducido] Autoría responsable



Research and publication of results has become part of our professional life. Until not so long ago, authorship seemed to be reserved for specialists linked to research departments, and a few at most would publish one study during their years as residents.¹ The current rules on internal advancement in hospitals, the «professional career», have resulted in an «obligation to publish». Unscrupulous journals even benefit from this by accepting any kind of publication in return for payment.² There are some ethical issues regarding this «need to publish», the well-known dilemma of «publish or perish», that we cannot ignore.³ It is, therefore, not uncommon for conflicts to arise between authors regarding their contribution to the work, the order of authorship and/or their participation. And we are not referring here to the «guest, gift, ghost, coercion, and/or honorary authorship» mentioned by several authors.^{1,4,5}

In this issue of the Journal, we publish and correct an *error in the authorship* of an article. This error includes the number and order of the authors, as well as the centre where the data was compiled. This error was corrected when the first author complained and after the journal's editorial management asked all the authors to acknowledge the error, in writing.

The basic principles for accepting a research paper for publication, whether it is basic or clinical, are ethical writing, peer review, and honest authorship.⁶ In a review of 2047 retracted articles, 67% had evidence of some form of fraud.⁷ Authorship conflicts are a frequent problem.

In today's age of collaborative research, authorship-related fraud has been attributed to an evaluation system that requires researchers to publish large numbers of articles because publications are important to how scientists, institutions and universities are ranked. In almost all academic disciplines, the number of publications is the most important measurable parameter for authors and the insti-

tutions to which they are attached.³ This could be a mistake, and we should consider changing the situation. Those in charge do not seem to be in any hurry to address the matter. The need to publish in order to advance from a non-research care position needs to be reviewed and new parameters set to evaluate professional excellence.

Authorship carries credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications – research grants.⁸ Authors must be able to take responsibility for all aspects of a published scientific article and must be able to defend the entire study, or their individual part of multidisciplinary articles. Disagreement about the authorship of an article, reported to the journal editor by any of the authors, calls into question the integrity of the entire paper.¹

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), known as the «Vancouver group»,⁹ provide guidance for ethical conduct in authorship conflicts.¹⁰ Their guidelines are not always respected. The literature on authorship practice has grown over the years and questionable practices have been identified. A more recent initiative, the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT), defines up to fourteen contributor roles, from the design of a study to its writing and editing.¹¹ The ICMJE criteria for including an author in a publication are: (1) Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; (2) Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; (3) Final approval of the version to be published; and (4) Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work. These guidelines have been evolving since 1978. Their first versions only referred to authorship criteria in a rather general way, asking authors to confirm that they had read the manuscript carefully and that they agreed with its content. Then in 1988 they mentioned a series of criteria, introducing for the first time the concept of the «author collective» to denote a group of authors, and the concept of «acknowledgement» for those who might not meet the author criteria, but who had nevertheless contributed intellectually to the study. The «order of authors» was introduced in 1994. The existing authorship criteria were expanded in 2013 to include a

DOI of original article:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.recot.2022.03.004>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.recot.2022.03.005>

1888-4415/© 2022 SECOT. Published by Elsevier España, S.L.U. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

fourth that all listed authors should agree to be accountable for all for all aspects of the work and ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of the work are resolved. It was also suggested that authorship should be decided before starting a study for articles that would involve several authors, perhaps even from other hospitals. In addition, the processes were detailed for corrections to the list or order of authors after submission of the manuscript, and the responsibilities of the corresponding authors. A requirement was added for authors to declare any potential conflicts of interest and a form provided that all the authors involved should sign. Subsequent versions have maintained these criteria. We should underline the importance of the corresponding author and the first author. They are accountable in the event of an ethical or content-related dispute, whereas the remaining co-authors can escape authorship responsibilities.

¹²

Any changes to the list of authors after an article has been submitted to a journal, revision or acceptance of the text should only be made with the full written consent of all the authors, including the author whose name was added or removed.¹³ Incorrect authorship and/or disagreement regarding authorship of the article submitted to the editor by any of the authors undermines the integrity of the entire paper and could result in rejection.

Publishing results is an act of responsibility towards readers and the community.

The Revista Española de Cirugía Ortopédica y Traumatología uses a universal procedure: (1) it receives an article for possible publication; (2) it informs each and every one of the authors signing it of receipt of the article, using the emails given in the manuscript, asking them if they agree with the submitted text, regardless of whether the email addresses provided are still in use; (3) it sends the manuscript for anonymous peer review, constructive and transparent; (4) it continues the editorial process, with corrections to the content if appropriate, and it is accepted or withdrawn from the process according to the opinion of the reviewers and the editorial committee. The editorial board does not know if the authors are who they say they are, or if their e-mail addresses or the centre are as claimed. If accepted, the article is published some time later, after sending the edited draft to which the authors can still make corrections.

References

1. Mavrogenis AF, Scarlat MM. Writing for «International Orthopaedics»: authorship, fraud, and ethical concerns. *International Orthopaedics*. 2021;45:2461–4.
2. Combalia A. Predatory and scam journals. *Revista Española de Cirugía ortopédica y Traumatología*. 2022;65:315–6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.recote.2021.07.001>.
3. LLuch E. Publicar o perecer. *La Vanguardia*. 2 septiembre 1999;21.
4. Zauner H, Nogoy NA, Edmunds SC, Zhou H, Goodman L. Editorial: We need to talk about authorship. *Gigascience*. 2018;7:giy122, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/gigascience/giy122>.
5. Gadjradj PS, Peul WC, Jalimsing M, Sharma JRJA, Verhemel A, Harhangi BS. Who should merit co-authorship? An analysis of honorary authorships in leading spine dedicated journals. *Spine J*. 2020;20:121–3.
6. Mavrogenis AF, Panagopoulos GN, Megaloikonomos PD, Panagopoulos VN, Mauffrey C, Quaile A, Scarlat MM. Scientific misconduct (Fraud) in medical writing. *Orthopedics*. 2018;41:e176–83.
7. Fang FC, Steen RG, Casadevall A. Misconduct accounts for the majority of retracted scientific publications. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*. 2012;109:17028–33.
8. Trilla A. Publicar o perecer ¿Perecer por publicar? *Enferm Infecc Microbiol Clin*. 2004;22:3–5, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0213-005x\(04\)73022-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0213-005x(04)73022-0).
9. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Available at: <http://www.icmje.org>. Accessed on: February 2022.
10. <https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>. Acceso en Febrero 2022.
11. <https://casrai.org/credit/> Acceso en Febrero 2022.
12. Lancet T. The role and responsibilities of coauthors. *Lancet*. 2008;372:778, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)61314-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)61314-8).
13. <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/co-authors-gone-bad-how-to-avoid-publishing-conflicts>.

Andrés Combalia

Deputy Editor

E-mail address: combalia@ub.edu

21 February 2022 14 March 2022