Authorship in Scholarly Publishing

Not so straightforward after all!

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Publish or “perish”

- Wish to advance science/ improve health outcomes
- Disseminate results of your (hard) work
- Enhance your status/track record/reputation
- Improve chances for promotion
- Improve likelihood for research grants
- Moral obligation to publish research
Isaac Newton  
(1643–1727)

“Isaac Newton was famously reluctant to publish, and when he did, to put his name to the work.”

Drummond Rennie
Purpose of authorship

• Right persons to receive credit
• Assign responsibility for the research
• DHET subsidy claims (in RSA)
Problems with authorship

- “Honorary (Gift)” authorship – not meeting all the criteria
- “Ghost authors” – professional writers or true author not listed
- Qualifying persons simply left out - student, supervisor, former colleague
- Order or authors (student/supervisor)
- Affiliations misleading
Who should be an author?

someone who has made substantive intellectual contributions to a published study

» ICMJE.org
ICMJE - Authorship credit should be based on:

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

Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3.
ICMJE – more guidance…

Author must also be able to:

• *take (public) responsibility for at least one component of the work,* and

• *identify who is responsible for each other component of the work*
Specialisation - Guarantor(s)

• With specialisation individuals may be taking responsibility for appropriate sections of the work, and it may be unreasonable for all to take responsibility for all aspects.

• However: One or more individuals required to take responsibility “as a whole” - the guarantors.
Large group research

• Group must *identify individuals who accepts direct responsibility* (they must all meet criteria) – “*responsible group*”

• *Group name given* and all individual members must be identified

NLM – list group name & responsible group as authors; rest of collaborators in acknowledgements
Number of authors

• No rules
• Databases (electronic) - list them all
• All that qualify must be listed

Caution: The more authors, the longer it takes to complete the task!
Order of authors

• Joint decision of all co-authors
• There must be an explanation for the order
• Generally a lead author – takes initiative
• Position of student/supervisor (student first)

*Tip*: decide before the time! If cannot decide, get independent person to arbitrate.
Contributions

• Some journals require a statement about the contribution of each person (if more than one), to be published.
Affiliations

- Affiliations **important in RSA (DHET subsidy)**.

**Tip:** List two affiliations, with first affiliation the one during the time of the study, second the current affiliation.
Acknowledgements

• Contributions that do not merit authorship
• Name person, and describe contribution (e.g. “John Citizen was responsible for language editing”)
• Funding/support received
• Permissions received (publish, use databases)

Note: All persons should be aware of their acknowledgement (signature may be required)
 Appeals to modify authors or affiliations

• Editors reluctant to become involved – no information to make a decision
• Editors will require written approval from all authors to make changes
• Dispute needs to be internally resolved
• Independent arbitrator
How to avoid authorship disputes

• *Policies* – department, faculty, university

• Institutions to encourage *culture of ethical authorship* – influence local customs and practice (education, example)

• **Discuss authorship** when planning research

• **Decide on authorship** when planning an article
Use the author guidelines

- Metadata (author info, abstract)
- Formatting
- Length, word count, tables, figures
- Style and system of referencing
- Correct submission (paper, online)
- Uniform requirements (ICMJE) – www.icmje.org
- COI policies
Thank you!

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