

■ *Editorial*

Authorship disputes: A research misconduct

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A large number of scientific articles are published annually in national and international biomedical journals from health sciences universities, where faculty members are required to submit a certain number of published papers in order to advance their careers. On one hand, this requirement promotes research initiatives among faculty members, however, it may also, create suspicion of misconduct or violation of universal ethical rules because the papers must be submitted within a specified time frame. Should research institutions have an active research integrity monitoring unit? Should career promotion be based on quality of service and excellence in performance? This question, perhaps, is more debatable than the former one.

We know that the ultimate goal of a researcher is the dissemination of research findings. This can be accomplished by presenting a paper in a scientific conference, publishing the material in a biomedical journal, or both. The former option is advantageous because the researcher can receive comments from the conference participants before writing a paper for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

It is expected that the authors of any paper are honest, objective and unbiased. Any deviation from the universally accepted norms of scientific works and publication rules is research misconduct. An example of intentional research misconduct is data fabrication. This is an unacceptable and a punishable transgression. Because of increasing awareness of this phenomenon among members of the scientific

community, misconduct of this sort is likely to be detected and investigated in order to avoid the repercussions of false reported data. Therefore, it is important that a researcher be firmly honest and responsible for his/her published work.

Duplicate publication of any data of a paper in whole or in part is unethical because of possible exaggeration of facts by the increased frequency of publication and its effect on meta-analysis due to the increased sample size.¹

Other reported areas of ethical violations include plagiarism, conflict of interest, authorship disputes, and human and animal welfare concerns.¹

Sometimes, there is a long list of the authors for a relatively small scientific paper submitted for publication. Though this happens quite often due to ignorance, the potential authors should qualify for the authorship. Authorship should be earned rather than offered. The requirements for authorship have well been defined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors and are as follows.²

“Authorship credit should be based on 1) substantial contribution 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. Acquisition of funding, collection of data, or general supervision of the research group alone does not constitute authorship. All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.”

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Research misconduct may go unnoticed at any institution, particularly where a monitoring mechanism is either ineffective or nonexistent. The published scientific work can only be meaningful to the scientific community if it is unbiased, honest and objective. The institute to which the authors belong should bear the responsibility for monitoring ethical issues and the accuracy of published work. The research integrity monitoring unit of the institute should solve the issues related to the authorship disputes.

1. Dale J. Benos, Jorge Fabres, John Farmer, Jessica P. Gutierrez, Kristin Hennessy, David Kosek, JooHyoung Lee, Dragos Olteanu, Tara Russell, FaheemShaikh, Kai Wang. Ethics and scientific publication . *Advances in Physiology Education* 2005; 29:59-74.
2. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Ethical Considerations in the Conduct and Reporting of Research: Authorship and Contributorship. http://www.icmje.org/ethical_1author.html (Accessed on 14.05.2012)