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Authorship in a Scientific Document

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Authorship in a Scientific Document

CHU-PAK LAU¹ AND CHUNG-WAH SIU²

From ¹Co-Editor, Journal of the Hong Kong College of Cardiology; ²Editor-in-Chief, Journal of the Hong Kong College of Cardiology

Multi-authored articles on scientific research are nowadays the norms rather than the exceptions. This is due to the increasing complexity of modern research, both basic and clinical, that involves different competencies and often in a different location either locally or internationally.¹ Often citation impact is greater in these papers with international co-operation. Co-operative research also introduces new ideas and centre advancement. However, this necessarily leads to problems such as relative author contribution, first and last authors issues, co-author self-citation and document accountability. In some situations, 'ghost' authors (e.g. an industrial sponsor) and 'guest' authors (e.g. a well known investigator in the field) may post further issues.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)^{2,3} has introduced the requirements of authorship (Table 1). These include (1) Substantial contribution to the conception, trial design, and data collection and interpretation. (2) Drafting or

revising on the manuscript. (3) Final approval of the submitted manuscript. (4) Accountable for all aspects of the work and ensuring questions pertaining to accuracy and integrity of any part of the work to be investigated and resolved. The last new requirement asks authors not only to be (morally) responsible for the work, but also in some way accountable. It is of course unreasonable to hold authors to be morally responsible for every case of research misconduct considering the complexity of modern research. Rather, this criterion suggests each author should collaborate with misconduct investigators if the paper is called into questions.²

The Journal of Hong Kong College of Cardiology (JHKCC) is an affiliated member of the Editors' Network, European Society of Cardiology (ESC) Task Force. In this issue of the JHKCC, the Network has published an article on problems encountered by cardiovascular Journal Editors not only on what constitute authorship, but also the problems faced especially for multi-authorship articles. These are summarized in the Table. All readers and potential contributors are suggested to read and appreciate these issues.

Much of the problems encountered if potential authors of an article should decide before the beginning of their research on their relative role to justify authorship after reflections of the above. In addition, the order of authorship in the final paper should it appear should be considered a prior, but subjected to change with agreement, to avoid future misunderstanding.

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Table 1. Issues on Authorship in a Scientific Document

Authorship Requirements	Remarks
Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant role in conception, design, data collection and interpretation • Document drafting and revising
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral obligation to ensure appropriate work
Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final approval of manuscript to be submitted
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate and co-operate when integrity of research is in question
Multi-Authorship	Remarks
Publishing individual contributions and conflicts	Standard forms
By-line location and hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First author (co-first) • Last author (co-last) • Guarantor • Percentage of contribution
Beaches in authorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghost authors • Guest authors
Citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-authors self-citation

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