

Responsible Authorship: A Herculean Task

Dr. Sujaya Gupta¹

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Teku, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Authorship misuse is highly prevalent in academic world of both developed as well as developing nations. In recent times, controversies related to the concept and practice of responsible authorship has been hot topic of discussion in the world of research integrity.¹ Scientists and academicians are credited based on their research publication profile leading to the much debated “publish or perish” status. Not only their career, but their performance, and accomplishment are also evaluated based on the number of publications they have authored, hence the authorship misuse.² Most commonly misused authorship are honorary (gift, guest, coercive) authorship and ghost authorship.¹ It is time we put stop to all forms of misuse of authorship and encourage quality of work rather than quantity.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has nicely listed out the four criteria to base authorship on: i) Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND ii) Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND iii) Final approval of the version to be published; AND iv) 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.³

Accurate and honest reporting of research methodologies and results are the basis of all scientific publications.⁴ Research publication is the highest form of dissemination of the findings from research.⁵ Authorship credit should reflect the individual’s contribution to the study.⁴ Providing funding, resources, mentorship, etc. do not qualify for authorship and thus should be frowned upon.⁴

The principal or first author (or corresponding author if different than the first author) should act like a Guarantor and make sure only the deserving researchers are credited as authors and all the authors approve of the final draft as stated in the ICMJE. “What does not constitute authorship” or “who should not be a co-author” should be addressed fairly and scientifically based on their contributions.⁶

To accomplish this, there is a much needed education regarding ethics of authorship and publication practices.² Responsible authorship practice can be improved by conducting numerous trainings on research and publication ethics. The trainees should be informed and reminded of the various pitfalls that highly acclaimed researchers faced and how they were publicly ostracised for irresponsible authorship and research misconduct.⁷ It can also be prevented by incorporating in curricula for young researchers and medical schools.¹ When young generation understand the difference between “publish or perish” and “publish and perish”, the practice of responsible authorship will no more be a Herculean task.

Correspondence

Dr. Sujaya Gupta

Email: sujayaagupta@gmail.com



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