

Clear as Glass

Recently, I was doing a PubMed search for a manuscript I was writing and noticed one or two articles that took up an entire page of the search engine; so many authors were listed that their names seemed to spill down my computer monitor and onto my desk. I am sure that many of you have seen this too. How is it possible that 50 or more authors could write one article? Of course the answer is simple—they did not all write the paper but were involved in the study reported on or work in the laboratory where a gene was sequenced. However, they were all cited as authors of the article. Is this ethical? It is certainly common practice, but the ethics of the practice are something else.

Beginning with the first issue of 2016, the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)* will join many other journals in publishing the contribution of each of the listed authors to the article. Why has this taken us so long? In part, this is an editorial decision, and I have always thought that nurses are honest and would not include anyone on a manuscript who had not contributed in a meaningful way to the writing of the manuscript. That belief has not changed. I have been an editor for a long time; eight years at a previous journal and almost four years at *ONF*. In that time, I have seen a handful of submissions where my intuition told me that something was wrong. My intuition speaks to me in various voices; most frequently, it sounds a little like Ethel Merman with a grating intensity that I cannot ignore. In all instances, a little digging or a straightforward query to the author elicited a basis for my intuition—the author worked for a pharmaceutical or medical device company or, in one case, was a ghost writer. Those manuscripts never saw the light of day, at least not in the journal I edited.

However, a more insidious practice exists, which is the inclusion of individuals by virtue of their position (e.g., head of department) or influence. These authors are called honorary authors, but how honorable their contribution is should be clear as glass. The International Commit-

tee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2015) recommends that an author is someone who makes a “substantial contribution to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work,” is involved in the “drafting of the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content,” gives “final approval of the version to be published,” and agrees to be accountable for ensuring the accuracy or integrity of the work (para. 2).

Ten years ago, I published a review in a medical journal. My clinical colleagues printed the article and pinned it to the notice board in the clinic. One of the physicians I worked with approached me and asked why his name was not included as an author. My answer was simple. I said, “Because you did

not know I was writing the article.” Not everyone can be as forthright and blunt. In my pique, I missed an opportunity to educate him on the criteria for being an author. However, some people may feel obliged or pressured to include supervisors or others in positions of power. I have gone toe-to-toe with academic colleagues who feel it is their right to be included as authors on student papers that they marked and commented on. This is a slightly more gray area, but I am not sure that assigning a topic and marking a paper entitles one to authorship; a more significant role seems to me to be a hallmark of authorship, but this criterion can and is debated. Of note, ICMJE requires all four previously mentioned criteria to be met. Students are in a precarious position vis-à-vis their supervisors and professors; I was fortunate in my time as an undergraduate and graduate student that my immediate supervisors made no claim on my work and encouraged me to publish as sole author, setting a good example for me when I took on those academic roles.

Even now, seeing my name on a published article makes my heart beat just a little bit faster and my smile stretch a little bit wider, even if it is just for a few minutes. I want that joy for all the authors published in the pages of this journal, and I want it to be a pure joy, not one sullied with feeling cheated because someone demanded that their name be included. I am proud of my list of publications because they are mine and do not include others who are riding on my coattails. I want that for everyone who publishes in this journal and elsewhere. Requiring



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authors to consider the role of all who claim contribution and then making that clear to our readers is our responsibility as caretakers of this journal. It is a lesson we should have learned in the sandbox: honesty is always the best policy.

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Key words: publishing; research; ethics

Reference

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2015). Defining the role of authors and contributors. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1ruKdnU>

ONF, 42(6), 579.
doi: 10.1188/15.ONF.579