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Letter to the Editor

Authors: Sapiens H, Consilius H, Laborem H, Mutuus H, Exercitationa H, Parasitorum H, Gloria H

İbrahim Onur Alıcı

Department of Pulmonology, Health Sciences University, Dr. Suat Seren Chest Diseases and Thoracic Surgery Training and Research Hospital, İzmir, Turkey

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Dear Editor,

Besides its professional satisfaction, being a journal author brings several academic, social, and financial implications. Real scientific authorship requires substantial efforts while conducting it along with a responsibility of the content. Therefore, an authorship should be clearly differentiated from other kinds of contribution. This issue has always been a problem for several investigators [1,2].

In order to "review best practice and ethical standards in the conduct and reporting of research and other material published in medical journals," International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has developed some recommendations [3]. This article contains a dedicated section on the authorship that delineates the importance of authorship, gives a brief definition of "the author," and allocates the roles of other kinds of contribution. About being an author, ICMJE recommends the following four distinct criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work;

2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content;

3. Final approval of the version to be published; and

4. 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.

These statements are widely accepted worldwide; there is a substantial number of journals using these recommendations which are either members of ICMJE or are voluntarily using them without membership (http://www.icmje.org/journals-following-the-icmje-recommendations). However, the journals and the editors are notably not responsible for deciding which individual should be designated as an author. It is the responsibility of the conductors of the study to decide whether a colleague is an author or not. The individuals who do not meet ALL four criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgements section. The ICMJE recommendations give some examples regarding such contributions as acquisition of funding; general supervision of a research group or general administrative support; and writing assistance, technical editing, language editing, and proofreading.

In the following section, I would like to define the main features of an author and then provide additional examples of pseudo-authors who should be better pronounced in the Acknowledgement sections.

The intelligence, design, and performance are the main ontological requirements of a study, just as mind, form, and matter are in Aristotle's hylomorphism. Thus, we may stratify the body of a study as establishing the main hypothesis (Homo sapiens; wise, rational, and philosophical), defining the methodology (Homo consilius; planner and designer) and accord-

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Address for Correspondence: İbrahim Onur Alıcı, Department of Pulmonology, Health Sciences University, Dr. Suat Seren Chest Diseases and Thoracic Surgery Training and Research Hospital, İzmir, Turkey
E-mail: ioalici@gmail.com

ingly intervening (Homo laborem; labor, effort, and work), which is followed by data acquisition, analysis, and discussion in the light of existing literature to decide whether the hypothesis is approved or not. Interpretation and discussion of the results by comparing with the data in the literature, which should be named "writing of a manuscript," is the effort that gives the core of philosophy behind the study. Thus, the manuscript should be written, reviewed, and approved only by the designers and performers of the study, and not by a third-party individual. This ensures the authorship, which gives desired academic, social, and financial advantages. These advantages are not only personal, but are also institutional and national. On behalf of Homo Sapiens, Homo Consilius, and Homo Laborem, I would like to provide some examples of those "honorary" and "ghost" authors [2].

Homo Mutuus

There may be a relation of mutual benefit between several investigators in a clinic or institution. Two colleagues may become an author in each other's studies to increase the number of their studies without any remarkable effort.

Homo Exercitationa

The data that comes from a routine practice of a colleague may not make him or her an author. For example, in a study on a multidisciplinary subject (i.e., lung cancer) which was planned and conducted by a pulmonologist; a thoracic surgeon, a radiologist, or a pathologist may appear as an author, although he or she did not fulfill the ICMJE criteria and instead only performed routine practice on the patients involved in the study.

Homo Parasitorum

Most embarrassingly, there may be some individuals who were not involved in any step of the investigation, but gathered an authorship by being a friend, using the power of chair, paramedical memberships, and so on.

Homo Gloria

Some investigators try to benefit from the glory of their respectable colleagues. Being an author also entails taking full responsibility of the study; in this case, the venerable colleague is mentioned as an author although he or she does not entirely know the study.

Homo Decipius

As is easily noted, Homo Decipius is not written as an author in the title. The reason is clear; he or she had a substantial effort in data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of the study, but could not have the opportunity to be an author; instead, he or she was only exploited.

These points do not mean that a lower number of authors is better. The number of authors increases as the science becomes more complex [4]. Alternatively, pseudo-authorship is the main problem that should be resolved. Departments of medical ethics within government or universities and national scientific societies are somewhat responsible for a possible correction. There are specific working groups within national scientific societies which comprise countless bright minds with a deep knowledge and experience in their fields and scientific methodology. A comprehensive discussion in a multidisciplinary assembly would easily result in a hypothesis in their field. Also, regarding the institutional nature of the working groups, a dedicated investigator should ensure the worthiness of an authorship. In addition, continuing educational programs may be implemented for post-graduation investigators.

In conclusion, the establishment of such scientific working groups should be encouraged not only at the national level, but also at an institutional level. Moreover, a nationwide update on medical and professional ethics is urgently required for raising the scientific reputation of the country to the desired level.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

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