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Guest authorship : The practice of author pooling- a method often practiced yet unreported

Heartfelt appreciation to the editorial board of Open medicine for conveying their policy on unethical authorship and for inviting readers feedback to improve the integrity of scientific writing[1]. Despite warning issued by journals on guest authorship in research publications it is well known that it continues to occur. Casual discussions with my friends around the globe who are interested in scientific publication reveal that most people consider guest authorship not as unethical as falsification of data. This opinion on guest authorship along with the lack of a suitable editorial model to prevent this practice and increasing pressure to publish leads to this unethical behaviour of well learned medical scientists. In this regard I wish to put a few words on the practice of author pooling, a simple method adopted by scientists to multiply their scientific publications. This information is based on invitations from global scientists who offered to include me in their author pool after observing my publications related to critical appraisal which had solitary author. How do people develop the pool? Let's presume that 2 physicians working in different institutions join author pool A. All publications made by author 1 will have author 2 as co-author without any significant contribution by the later and vice-versa. This doubles each other publications. If it is 4 physicians in two institutions then it becomes a 4 fold increase in the number of publication and so on. This kind of author pooling is probably maximum in smaller publications like case reports , clinical images and critical correspondence. However ,it also happens in original articles . Though I am putting it as an information, hope most readers will agree that this is a well known fact. **Is there a possible solution to it?**

The advancement in research database have enabled easy identification of articles published by a particular author. Let's consider that Open medicine decides to scrutinize the publication history of the corresponding author whose manuscript has been recently

published in the journal. The analysis will ultimately tell us if a group of individuals frequently co-author with the person under scrutiny . If such a group is identified then the second step will be to peruse each of his publication and his co-authors publication to ascertain the institutional and specialty origin of authors. This has to be followed by a protocol by which we may possibly suspect guest authorship. Evolving this method may not be simple but is possible. All we need to know is about the different methods adopted by scientist who practice this method. Obviously individuals who practice this method may not be revealing. But scientists who have academic or institutional relationship with them who believe in transparency in research may help. If I see a publication of my colleague which has guest authorship I can easily identify them since these names would have blossomed only in the article and never during our casual discussion about the article with them. Sometimes authors discuss their strategy in public and even try to justify them

To identify these unethical methods it may be prudent to open up an opinion poll globally , inviting scientists to put in their view points , suggestions or experiences on this issue. Being soft on guest authorship should probably come to an end. For this we need to evolve strategies to at least suspect it. When scientists are aware that they are being watched the rate of guest authorship will definitely fall though will not vanish.

References:

1. Murray S, Brophy J, Palepu A. Open Medicine's ghost and guest authorship policy.

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