

Chapter-31

Evolution of the ICMJE and its recommendations about authorship

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Formation of International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) is credited to a suggestion made by Ms. Augusta Litwer who worked as Secretary to an eminent nephrologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, USA. She got tired of retyping the articles rejected by one journal to prepare them for submission to another which demanded a different format as well as style of referencing. It is reported that she wrote to the Editors of Annals of Internal Medicine, the Journal of American Medical Association besides New England Journal of Medicine. She suggested them to reconsider and standardize their requirements.¹ This has also been reported by Thomas A. Lang in his book.²

Ten years later a meeting of some Medical Journal Editors was held at Vancouver, British Columbia where the suggestion put forward by Ms. Litwer was discussed. This resulted in the formation of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) in 1978. As a result of this meeting the “Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals” was prepared standardizing the guidelines. ICMJE keeps on reviewing these recommendations after almost every two years or so and the last time it has revised them were in 2015.³

Who is an Author?

The latest revised recommendations by the ICMJE states that authorship should be based on the following four criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
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.

In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work he or she has done, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work. In addition, authors should have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors. Though the ICMJE criteria for authorship stated that “All those designated as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, and all who meet the four criteria should be identified as authors” but sometimes it is not possible. Hence, the editors of respective journals take the decision keeping in view the prevailing situation and some of them then ask them to add contributor ship of each author as to what has been done by different people listed as authors.

ICMJE recommendations state that “Those who do not meet all four criteria should be acknowledged”. These authorship criteria are intended to reserve the status of authorship for those who deserve credit and can take responsibility for the work. However, all individuals who meet the first criterion should have the opportunity to participate in the review, drafting, and final approval of the manuscript.

It is the collective responsibility of the authors, not the journal to which the work is submitted, to determine that all people named as authors meet all four criteria; it is not the role of journal editors to determine who qualifies or does not qualify for authorship or to arbitrate authorship conflicts. In case no agreement about authorship is reached between the authors, it is the institution(s) where the study was done, should be asked

to investigate. The Journal Editors are not involved in this in any way. If authors request removal or addition of an author after manuscript submission or publication, journal editors should seek an explanation and signed statement of agreement for the requested change from all listed authors and from the author to be removed or added.

Correspondence Author:

“The corresponding author is the one individual who takes primary responsibility for communication with the journal during the manuscript submission, peer review, and publication process, and typically ensures that all the journal’s administrative requirements, such as providing details of authorship, ethics committee approval, clinical trial registration documentation, and gathering conflict of interest forms and statements, are properly completed. The corresponding author should be available throughout the submission and peer review process to respond to editorial queries in a timely way, and should be available after publication to respond to critiques of the work and cooperate with any requests from the journal for data or additional information should questions about the paper arise after publication. Although the corresponding author has primary responsibility for correspondence with the journal, the ICMJE recommends that editors send copies of all correspondence to all listed authors.”⁴

Multi-author Groups: “When a large multi-author group has conducted the work, the group ideally should decide who will be an author before the work is started and confirm who is an author before submitting the manuscript for publication. All members of the group named as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, including approval of the final manuscript, and they should be able to take public responsibility for the work and should have full confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the work of other group authors. They will also be expected as individuals to complete conflict-of-interest disclosure forms”.⁴

Authorship by Group Name: Some large multi-author groups designate authorship by a group name, with or without the names of individuals. When submitting a manuscript authored by a group, the corresponding author should specify the group name if one exists, and clearly identify the group members who can take credit and responsibility for the work as authors.

Contributors to the study other than Authors:

ICMJE recommendations state that “Contributors who meet fewer than all four of the above criteria for authorship should not be listed as authors, but they should be acknowledged. For example acquisition of funding; general supervision of a research group or general administrative support; and writing assistance, technical editing, language editing, and proofreading does not qualify one to be listed as an author.

Written permission needed from those mentioned in acknowledgment: “Because acknowledgment may imply endorsement by acknowledged individuals of a study’s data and conclusions, editors may ask the corresponding author to obtain written permission to be acknowledged from all acknowledged individuals.”⁴

REFERENCES

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