

July 7, 2016

AUTHORSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

Dear Faculty:

We have been dealing with multiple issues in defining the roles of authorship and contributions to published work. We thought this was a good opportunity for us to review the recommendations from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) on what constitutes grounds for authorship. The [ICMJE](#)¹ clearly defines 4 criteria, including:

- 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 from the view point of 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 raised to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Specifically, those who do not meet all of the criteria cannot be acknowledged as an author. Most importantly, contributors who meet fewer than 4 of the criteria should not be listed as an author, but should be acknowledged. Examples of activities that merit acknowledgement, but not authorship, include the acquisition of funding; general supervision of a research group or general administrative support; writing and writing assistance of technical editing, language editing and proofreading; and providing access to an existing dataset.

The issue of authorship is particularly important to our junior faculty as they launch their independent careers in terms of publication and become recognized as important contributors to the literature. Recently, universities such as Harvard have been very specific as to how junior investigators include senior colleagues in their publications. There are a number of misconceptions. On one hand, junior investigators may believe that including their senior colleagues is expected or will improve the credibility of their work. On the other hand, many senior faculty members believe that they should be listed as an author based solely on logistic, financial or administrative support alone.

¹ International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. December 2015.

Another approach to fostering independence for our junior investigators is for senior investigators not to be listed as the senior author, but rather in a co-author position. Often in published papers, the most experienced contributing author is listed as last author. We recommend that the primary or lead author of the paper be responsible for setting the order of authorship.

It is also important to note that violation of the policies for authorship on scientific and scholarly publications is considered research misconduct as defined by the [University of Toronto's Policy on Ethical Conduct in Research](#), the [Faculty of Medicine's Principles and Responsibilities Regarding Conduct of Research](#) and the [University of Toronto Framework to Address Allegations of Research Misconduct](#). Authorship issues that arise in the Department of Medicine should be flagged to the Chair and Vice Chair Research, to be referred to the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation, as necessary. There are guidelines that have been developed to resolve authorship disputes and we will enforce and encourage all authors to come to resolution on any authorship issue.

We hope to create a dialogue within the Department of Medicine to evaluate how we acknowledge contributions of co-investigators and senior colleagues when appropriate authorship is earned. We look forward to your feedback on these suggestions as we aim to acknowledge the contributions of all investigators, while at the same time encourage the independent careers of our young and emerging leaders.

Yours sincerely,

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