

Authorship is a responsibility as much as credit

Sir,

Research is a systemic way to advance current scientific knowledge and to guide further clinical management. The authors are collectively responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the conducted research work. Generally, the researcher thinks more of credit rather than responsibility while writing a research paper. Authorship not only confers credit but implies responsibility and accountability for published work.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) recommends that each author should meet the following 4 criteria;

- Contributed to the conception or design; or involved in acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data
- Drafting or revising the work
- Final approval of the version to be published
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of work.^[1]

According to these recommendations, if the authors are equally contributing and are responsible for the final product of research then the credit should also be equal. Unfortunately, the criteria used to determine the order in which authors are listed on the byline and contribution may vary widely and are usually decided collectively by the author group. Although ICMJE guidelines are followed by many journals, these are deficient in many perspectives. For instance, no criteria have been outlined for defining the first author nor any recommendations have been made regarding author order. By tradition in medical literature, if not listed alphabetically, the first author makes the largest contribution, the last author is the most senior and the middle authors' credit and contributions are vague unless mentioned in a contribution list. Despite this tradition, there are no firm guidelines in place to guarantee a fair interpretation of authors' contributions.^[2] In general, authorship order in a publication byline and contribution is thought to be consistent. Perhaps, the fact is rather controversial and there is no consensus among the scientific community regarding this issue. The author byline is an indispensable component of a scientific paper. However, the relationship between the authors' order and contribution remains inconsistent. Different scientific fields have different ways of authorship

order, contribution, and weighting credit. Yang *et al.* have compared three prominent journals to assess the relationship between the author byline and the contribution list. They concluded, that the relationship between the two remains unclear.^[3] In another study, Baerlocher *et al.* have investigated four journals in a span of 3 years period. They found for most categories of contribution, the levels of participation were highest for first authors, followed by last and then second authors. Middle authors had lower levels particularly in conception, drafts of the manuscript, supervision, and being a guarantor.^[4] Smith *et al.* have developed a five-step "best practice" that incorporates the distribution of both contributor-ship and authorship for multi/interdisciplinary research. This procedure involves continuous dialogue and the use of a detailed contributor-ship taxonomy ending with a declaration explaining contributor-ship, which is used to justify authorship order.^[5]

We suggest The ICMJE authorship criteria should strictly be followed by the authors and the role of each author should be mentioned in the contribution list which should be consistent with the authors byline on the publication.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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