

## Authorship disputes and amicable solutions in scholarly publication: the road ahead

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### Dear Editor

The pressure to adhere to the "publish or perish" dictum in academic publishing has become a global phenomenon. Unfortunately, this often leads to authorship disputes among researchers. These disputes manifest in various forms, including gift authorship, author displacement, and ghost authorship. Such practices have contributed to a lower level of trust among researchers, which ultimately impacts the quality of academic work.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, ghost authorship involves omitting or concealing an author's name in published research papers.<sup>2</sup> Ghost authorship continues to pose a significant challenge in academic publishing, with a range of reasons as to why academics may resort to such practices. For example, junior researchers may be refused authorship by their senior or head faculty in an attempt to increase the weightage of each author's work and increase the constituent counts of academic activity. Furthermore, ghost authoring may be used to conceal potential conflicts of interest, in which publications are authored by ghost authors paid by a firm, but credit is given to a prominent researcher in a field of interest to increase their scientific success. In some cases, manuscripts may even be drafted by a ghost author who is not associated with the research assigned by the senior faculty to gain more time.<sup>2,3</sup>

Another form of authorship dispute that has become

common in academic publishing is gift authorship. This practice involves adding a name to the author list even when they have not contributed significantly to the study or research in question. There are several reasons why researchers may resort to gift authorship, including adding a reputed researcher of interest to the author list to increase the chances of the paper being accepted or qualifying for grant funding. In some cases, gift authorship may be used to encourage collaboration and maintain a positive work environment. Additionally, researchers may use gift authorship as a form of reward for goodwill.<sup>3,4</sup>

It is widely recognized that publishing scientific papers under a pseudonym is an unethical practice that violates the basic principles of public accountability for researchers' work.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that, in recent years, a publication under a pseudonym has received strong criticism from the academic community, ultimately leading to its retraction. This serves as a clear indication of the level of scrutiny such practices are subjected to and the seriousness with which they are taken within the academic world.<sup>5,6</sup>

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) has established guidelines for editors to follow when they detect manuscripts that have been ghostwritten.<sup>7</sup> These protocols have been put in place to increase transparency and prevent unethical practices in medical publishing.

According to these guidelines, editors should issue a notice in the corresponding journal publicizing that the manuscript has been ghostwritten, along with the names of the responsible companies and authors submitted. Additionally, editors should caution the authors' institutions and recognize the involvement of commercial companies in order to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to prevent future incidents. The information relating to ghostwriting should also be made public to the media or government organizations to increase awareness and promote accountability. Lastly, editors are encouraged to share their experiences on the WAME and within other forums so that others can learn from these issues and take steps to prevent them from happening again. By adhering to these protocols, editors can help ensure that ethical standards are upheld in medical publishing.<sup>7</sup>

It is crucial for authors and institutions to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of authorship guidelines, such as lucid authorship policies, to ensure equitable credit allocation and avoid authorship disputes. In the event of a conflict, mediation and arbitration can serve as effective methods for resolving disputes.<sup>8</sup>

To promote transparency and integrity in research, institutions should consider implementing anonymous reporting mechanisms for authorship disputes and prioritize safeguarding research integrity over institutional reputation. Additionally, offering training on a publication code of ethics that includes authorship disputes can be highly beneficial for future and young researchers. Universities around the globe can incorporate such training into medical curricula at the undergraduate level to foster research acumen.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is a prominent authority in India for biomedical research. In recognition of the crucial role of research integrity and publication ethics, the ICMR took a crucial step by drafting a policy on these topics. The ICMR policy on research integrity and publication ethics 2019 draws from guidelines provided by both the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), establishing a solid foundation for ethical research practices in India.<sup>9</sup>

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is the primary body responsible for advancing the quality of higher education in India. In December 2021, the UGC took a significant step to promote academic integrity and research quality across its affiliated academic institutions by publishing an academic integrity and research quality document. This document provides comprehensive guidelines that advocate for the fundamental principles of ethics, publishing codes, and research practices across diverse scientific disciplines.<sup>10</sup>

As the use of artificial intelligence tools (AIT), including ChatGPT and large language models, becomes increasingly prevalent in academic publications, concerns about authorship disputes are on the rise.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, AITs fall short in meeting the necessary requirements for authorship, leaving the responsibility of submitted work unaccounted for.

Given that they are not legal entities, it is not possible for artificial intelligence tools (AIT) to confirm the presence or lack of conflicts of interest. Additionally, they are incapable of managing copyright and license agreements. Therefore, it is imperative for authors to disclose any information regarding the use of AIT in the preparation of their manuscripts, as well as in the production of images or graphs and the collection and analysis of data during manuscript submission.<sup>11</sup> To combat the potential for authorship disputes arising from the integration of artificial intelligence tools (AIT) in medical publications, it is crucial for medical universities to take proactive measures. One way to address this issue is for universities to form committees specifically dedicated to crafting guidelines that align with those set forth by ICMJE, COPE, and WAME regarding AIT.

#### **Acknowledgment**

None.

#### **Competing interests**

None.

#### **Abbreviations**

World Association of Medical Editors: WAME;  
Indian Council of Medical Research: ICMR;  
International Committee of Medical Journal Editors: ICMJE;  
Committee on Publication Ethics: COPE;

University Grants Commission: UGC;  
Artificial intelligence tools: AIT.

### Consent for publication

By submitting this document, the authors declare their consent for the final accepted version of the manuscript to be considered for publication.

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