

EDITORIAL

To be an author

It is a strange confession for an Editor-in-Chief but the more I edit, the more I review, and the more immersed I have become in academic publishing, the less I understand what an author is. I know I am very grateful to authors. I also know we would each like to be one, or at least many of us would, and I know that without authors journals like *JHPS* would simply not exist.

Yet how many authors does it really take to put together a single paper? Authorship issues are perhaps the most common cause of conflict in the scientific publishing world. There are authors who believe their name should have been included on the contributor list when they were not, and there are authors who believe they should not have been included when they were. There are authors, too, who believe they should have been first on the list, or maybe last, and there are plenty who appear not to care, as long as they feature somewhere. Indeed the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), that bastion of editorial and ethical guidance, has recently issued a discussion document that tries to clear the air. Well written though it may be, the conclusion says all – “What is clear is that authorship is a fluid, evolving concept and as it evolves so will the ethical challenges associated with it.” [1] How can academic publishing, *JHPS* in our case, make sense of any of this?

Perhaps it starts with someone called Harold Jefferson Coolidge who, in 1932, has been long credited with coining the phrase “Publish or Perish”. [2] Perish is no joke either. If you are feeling strong, do read the sad story of Professor Stefan Grimm of London’s Imperial College who committed suicide in September 2014. [3] It puts the pressure to publish in a completely different light. Actually in Grimm’s case it was not so much that he had failed to publish – he had a good track record – but that he had apparently failed to undertake sufficiently expensive research. [4] What on earth will we accuse our colleagues of next?

In terms of the number of authors, Greene notes in his article on the demise of the lone author, [5] that from the 1600s until about 1920 the general rule was one author per paper. By 1980 this had all but disappeared. Collaboration

and multidisciplinary research had become commonplace and multiple authors started to become, quite simply, the way things were. [6] Yet authorship is so critical to so many that the need to appear on a paper has almost become an essential requirement of both academic and clinical life. The hunt for the so-called God particle (Higgs boson) most probably carries the present record. Two research teams working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research produced a combined author list of two articles that stretched to 19 pages and is estimated to carry 6000 names. [7] This soundly beats the 2900 authors credited with the appearance in *Nature* of the sequencing of the human genome [8] and which has been cited more than 17500 times.

So when faced with numbers so huge, how many authors is a reasonable number for a single submission to a journal, *JHPS* in particular? My own view is that it does not matter. What does matter is that each author should be able to carry responsibility for the end result, should have played a significant part in bringing the paper to fruition and, in due course, publication. Guidelines do exist. Perhaps the most widely quoted are those from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) [9] that, in response to the question, “Who is an author?” declares that authorship should be based on 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.

The ICMJE goes on to say that contributors who do not fit their definition of an author can be acknowledged instead. Examples of activities that would not classify for authorship

might include acquisition of funding, general supervision of a research group, or general administrative support and writing assistance, technical editing, language editing, and proofreading. Do I hear some of us shout “Help!”?

What I would certainly recommend is that each of us discusses authorship before a study begins and we avoid patching in names at the end. Remember that authorship is the single biggest point of conflict in scientific publishing. In hip preservation we are no exception.

Meanwhile our journal, your journal, the one and only *JHPS*, appears to be going from strength to strength. Your papers are flooding in, so thanks to all who have taken the plunge and submitted. Your trust and willingness to help are much appreciated. It is not easy starting a new journal in this era of journal-a-day publishing. Issue 2.1 was first class. Again it is difficult to know where to start. However, for one of the most comprehensive analyses of hip-related outcome measures, it must be difficult to beat the systematic review by Ramisetty, Kwon and Mohtadi. [10] I have been referring to the article repeatedly since it was published. The paper by Erickson et al [11] I found also to be fascinating as it highlights so well the differences in arthroscopic hip preservation around the world. No surprises to learn that North America published the largest number of studies on the subject, coming in at an astonishing 58%. Clearly the rest of us will have to do better.

Turning to this issue (2.2), there are some tremendous papers and I commend them all to you. One section is particularly interesting, and that is the minisymposium put together by Hal Martin and his colleagues. Extra-articular hip pathology is manifestly a rapidly expanding sector of hip preservation surgery. Certainly if I was starting out today as a young surgeon, taking his first steps into the hip arthroscopic world, I would be focused on extra-articular surgery entirely. I am sure we have barely touched the surface of this new and fascinating world.

My very best wishes to you all.

Richard Villar

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Journal of Hip Preservation Surgery

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