

Rights of authorship — where can justice be found?

Fatema Jawad

Responsible research publication is the objective of the teachings of Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) for all authors and editors. International standards have been established through the document,

A position statement was developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010 by Elizabeth Wager and Sabine Kleinert.

The document clearly states that, " Authors should take collective responsibility for submitted and published work. The authorship of research publications should accurately reflect individuals' contributions to the work and its reporting."¹

The instructions enclose soundness and reliability, honesty, balance, originality, transparency, appropriate authorship and acknowledgement, accountability and responsibility, adherence to peer review and publication conventions and responsible reporting of research involving humans or animals

In the section on, Appropriate Authorship and Acknowledgement, it is clearly stated that, "the authorship of research publications should therefore accurately reflect individuals' contributions to the work and its reporting."

In the light of the ethical teachings of COPE, the situation prevailing in some quarters in Pakistan is not highly satisfactory. Research is now being promoted in the medical curriculum of undergraduate students. The seniors who should be mentors do not have any formal training themselves in research. They are experienced in clinical practice. It is well accepted that guidance from research oriented mentors, funding and training, all play a crucial role in conducting high quality research.^{2,3} The students are keen to do research but need guidance. They are willing to invest in time and hard work and are willing to learn.

On the other hand the senior faculty who have the responsibility of mentorship are handicapped with lack of expertise and time. A study conducted on medical

students and fresh medical graduates in five private and public medical colleges of Karachi found that the faculty needed publications for promotion in career. For this purpose they used the students for the cumbersome areas of the projects without giving them due credit.⁴

Students need guidance in undertaking research and writing out their findings. It is the moral responsibility of the senior faculty to provide this help. The energy, vigour and keenness of the younger generation is at times misused by the those with authority leading to usurping of the juniors' rights. One such incident was reported by three bright final year medical students of Karachi. They carried out research for a project in 2012 under the supervision of an Assistant Professor in a cardiology institute. The students prepared the synopsis and proforma, collected the data and entered it for analysis. At this stage, the supervisor asked for the soft and hard copies of the entire data for checking and further guidance. In all confidence and sincerity the students handed over all the important documents to the supervisor. After having all the data, the attitude of the supervisor suddenly changed. He categorically stated that the publication of the study would only be permitted if the supervisor's name is placed as the first author. The explanation given was that the study was too good to be done by students. The supervisor further threatened the students by warning them that if they refused to further proceed with the writing work, the study would be published without including their names as co-authors.

The students decided not to continue with the writing of the article as they were being deprived of their rights. The supervisor did not permit the students to defend their cause. A couple of months later one of the students attended a national cardiology conference and was surprised and disappointed to see that two presentations had been made from the research of these students and presented by the supervisor, without including the student's names. Some more names of unconcerned people had been included as co-authors.

Who is going to provide justice in this cause? Do seniority and position give the seniors a right to impinge on the rights of the juniors?

.....
Editor in Chief, Journal of Pakistan Medical Association.

Correspondence: Email: fatemajawad@gmail.com

References

1. Wager E, Kleinert S. Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. Chapter 50 in: Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore 2011, pp 309-16. (ISBN 978-981-4340-97-7)
 2. Timmons S, Park J. A qualitative study of the factors influencing the submission for publication of research undertaken by students. *Nurse Educ Today* 2008; 28: 744-50.
 3. Hendrix D. An analysis of bibliometric indicators, National Institutes of Health funding, and faculty size at Association of American Medical Colleges medical schools, 1997-2007. *J Med Libr Assoc* 2008; 96: 324-34.
 4. Ejaz K, Shamim MS, Shamim SH, Hussain SA. Involvement of medical students and fresh medical graduates of Karachi, Pakistan in research. *JPMA* 2011; 61: 115 - 120.
-