



Writers' Versus Readers' Rights

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In Volume 3, Number 2, 1988, of *The International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Implants*, the editorial policy related to manuscript authorship was stated as: "no more than four authors in a manuscript by-line." The *JOMI* editorial staff gave considerable thought to the need for and content of such a policy to "encourage potential authors to carefully consider their moral and ethical obligations to the educational process, their readers, and fellow authors in providing a quality product which will truly enhance the credibility of those whose names appear on the manuscript."

Since publication of its authorship policy, the editorial staff has received an occasional communication questioning its intent and the limitations placed upon potential authors. Statements suggesting usurpation of "writer's rights" and the obstruction of literary freedom have made their way to the editor's desk. Some authors of papers with by-lines containing five to seven co-authors have threatened withdrawal of their manuscripts from consideration if the policy were to be strictly enforced.

Since the inception of *JOMI*, its objectives have been the dissemination of current information related to the management of patients utilizing implant modalities and to report the results of basic and clinical research by investigators whose studies embrace the implant concept. Emphasis has been placed on the encouragement of scientific articles, which by definition must include valid and accurate information. While of some clinical interest, anecdotal experience is commonly found in the papers of "disposable" publications. It is our intention that *JOMI* contain a minimum of that type of material.

Huth¹ has suggested that abuses in scientific publishing include wasteful publication and irresponsible authorship. Among the wasteful publication abuses he cited were divided publications (breaking down the findings of a single piece of research into multiple parts) and repetitive publication (republishing the same material in successive papers, book chapters, or reviews). To these categories could be added the tremendous waste of publication pages in printing redundant anecdotal material.

The matter of irresponsible authorship also includes author numbers. Again, Huth has proposed that irresponsible authorship contains two species: unjustified authorship (nonparticipating advisors, department chairs, clinical cronies, technicians, etc) and incomplete authorship (failure to include as authors those who did contribute to the critical content of the paper). Unquestionably, group-oriented research and data resources obtained from multicenter involvement have increased

the numbers of potential contributors. However, if one embraces the principle of authorship which states that a responsible author will have participated in: (1) the conception or design of the work represented by the article or analysis and interpretation of the data or both; (2) drafting of the article or revising it for critically important content; and (3) final approval of the version to be published, it is inconceivable that routinely more than four authors would be so involved. Since there are always exceptions, the role of a journal editorial staff becomes more hazardous.

As a writer, any individual or group of individuals has the right in a free society to creatively compose a literary piece for public consumption, be it a work of fact or fiction. However, when laboratory or clinical science is involved, reporting of the method and results of investigation must ethically be based on honesty and truth regardless of the number of authors involved. In this competitive era of publication, the reader of scientific periodicals rightfully expects to receive authoritative, current, enlightening, accurate, attractively and simply presented information. Using these criteria, among others, readers can and do select their literary resources. To protect the reader and ensure journal integrity and quality, concerned editors have formed the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.² The uniform requirements they have established are noteworthy, and potential authors of scientific papers would do well to heed their guidelines. Their efforts continue to be directed toward the improvement and conservation of scientific journal resources.

The editorial staff of *JOMI* is cognizant of the rights of both the authors and readers of scientific publications. It has no mandate or desire to dictate writing style and manuscript content. However, morally and ethically we do feel a sense of responsibility to guide authors in their preparation of scientific papers by insistence upon adherence to format, qualifications of participating authors, the quality and veracity of data, relevance of illustrative material, and the presentation of new information to the scientific community. Uncontrolled publication in the guise of science only contributes to the quagmire of printed trivia from which the reader must be sheltered.

***JOMI* Authorship Policy (Amended 1989)**

Recognizing the need for flexibility in administering journal authorship policy, the *JOMI* editorial staff recently amended its policy as follows:

The authorship policy of *The International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Implants* ordinarily provides for no more than four authors in a manuscript by-line. Others who may have contributed secondary assistance, however significant, may be listed in an acknowledgment addendum at the end of the paper. Because of international variations in academic literary protocol, multicenter investigations, and other special circumstances, the editorial chairman reserves the right to grant exceptions to this policy.

1. Huth EJ: Irresponsible authorship and wasteful publication. *Ann Med* 1986;104:257-259.
2. Huth EJ: Guidelines on authorship of medical papers. *Ann Med* 1986;104:269-274.

