

Authorship and the role of medical writers

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EDITORIAL

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In the correspondence section of this month's journal there is an interesting debate on the role of medical writers in scientific publication. Dr Vallance raises the issue of 'medical ghostwriting' and authors' responsibilities,¹ Professors Holz and Meyer² rightly confirm that they have appropriately acknowledged the contribution of a medical writer to their publication,³ and Gail Flockhart confirms how her company follows current best practice in publishing.⁴

The role of medical writers in scientific publication can appear to be a controversial issue. Happily there are well-formulated guidelines to assist authors, medical writers, and editors. This ensures that publications that include medical writers are transparent, ethical, and avoid charges of conflict of interest. Useful sources of information include the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (http://www.icmje.org/ethical_1author.html), Good publication practice for communicating company sponsored medical research: the GPP2 guidelines⁵ and the Authors Submission Toolkit.⁶ Following these guidelines increases trust in the process of peer reviewing and publishing of industry sponsored/supported research.

As the Authors Submission Toolkit⁶ states 'help from a professional writer can raise reporting standards, improve compliance with guidelines, and elevate overall editorial quality. The World Association of Medical Editors therefore states, 'Editors should make clear in their journal's information for authors that medical writers can be legitimate contributors.' ... If the contributions of a professional medical writer do not meet authorship criteria, these contributions

must be disclosed, including the writer's name and any associated third-party organization. The practice of ghostwriting (ie, the unacknowledged use of writing assistance) for medical publications is deemed unacceptable.'

Eye, like many other journals works to these guidelines. Dr Vallance is of course correct in stating that ghostwriting is unacceptable. The article by Professors Holz and Meyers is an example of best practice where all appropriate acknowledgement of authors and contribution was correctly made. Adhering to these guidelines and Eye's instruction to authors ensure proper transparency and best practice in article submissions.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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