



Editorial

Authors, contributors, editors, guarantors and the Vancouver Group

An Editor of a specialist clinical journal such as *EJCN* tries, with the advice of expert reviewers, to select the manuscripts which provide the most new and useful information for workers in the field of clinical nutrition. The selected manuscripts are then almost always revised in the light of the reviewers' comments to present the material as clearly, concisely and accurately as possible for publication. This remains the primary function, but advances in information technology and academic practice have put additional tasks on editors.

A publication in a peer-reviewed journal is not merely a means by which research results can be made available to other investigators. It is also a source of credit to the authors, and to the institution in which the research was done, so publication seriously influences the careers of individuals and the allocation of research funding. Editors may therefore become involved in disputes about who, and in what order, investigators should be listed as "authors". The pressure to publish has caused increased concern about research based on inadequate, or even fraudulent, data, so editors are concerned about the integrity of the research they publish. It is therefore necessary to ensure that, after publication, someone is able to vouch for the data if its integrity is suspect, and that it is held in a designated archive in the host department in case it is required for further analysis.

These problems have been tackled with varying success by the "Vancouver Group", who are mainly editors of

large weekly general medical journals. In the third International Congress on Biomedical Peer Review, which was held in Prague in September 1997, the issues were debated widely among 300 participants from 50 countries. There was consensus that the problems outlined above suggest that, rather than have a list of "authors" to a paper it would be more helpful to have a list of "contributors", of whom one or more would be a "guarantor". The *Lancet* have already adopted the idea of contributors, listed in the order of the magnitude of their contribution to the whole research, with a note at the end of the article explaining who did what. The *BMJ* will list both contributors and guarantors for original articles (Smith R 1997 *BMJ* 315:696). *EJCN* is cautiously following a similar route. The "Directions to Contributors" inside the back cover of this journal has been altered to ask that the contributions of investigators to the research should be explained, and that a guarantor who will vouch for the data should be identified.

We hope that these changes will be helpful both to investigators and readers, and will not be an intolerable burden on those preparing manuscripts. Meanwhile we would be interested to publish letters from potential contributors about the advantages or disadvantages of this policy.

JS Garrow, JC Seidell