



Authors: who they are and which their responsibilities are

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Prepare an article, be accepted by the journal and be published. A happy ending of a research normally elaborated by a group of professionals. The question is: who are these people? How are they included as authors? What are their merits and responsibilities?

The discussions concerning authorship are recurrent. There is a lot of literature on this theme, and authors and publishers must reflect on this. So, what makes each one, the author of an article? How to establish who the first one and the last one will be? How many can be listed as authors? Who are the contributors?

In this tangle of questions, there are some universal definitions for the authors, and others which belong to the responsibility of the journal editors. The recommendation of the *International Committee of Medical Journals Editors* (ICMJE) is a reference for the theme, also known as the Vancouver Group that established a series of rules and procedures, among them, the Vancouver Protocol for the bibliographical references for the publications of the area of health ⁽¹⁾.

But, what does this Committee say regarding the authorship in scientific journals? There are three criteria for one to be considered an author: (1) substantial contribution in the conception of the project and in the planning, or data collection, or the analysis and interpretation of the data; (2) writing and elaboration of the article or critical intellectual revision of the data and (3) approval of the final version to be published. This last criterion involves all the authors and they are responsible for the exactness and the integrity of the information and must answer and solve any doubts resulting from it ⁽¹⁾.

Although they appear to be simple, these criteria have received diversified interpretations, they have restricted knowledge and maybe they are not understood in their amplitude. This, progressively provoked the journals to require of a document signed by each one of the authors, specifying their contribution. The correspondence regarding the handling of the article in the journal is shared with all the authors ⁽²⁾.

The Rev Rene adopts the following criteria of Responsibilities of Authorship: the authors must declare having contributed directly for the intellectual content of the work; they must have conceived and planned the activities which resulted in the work or interpreted the results; having written the work or revised the successive versions and taken part in the process of revision and having approved the final version to be published. People who do not comply with such requirement and had no technical participation or general support can be mentioned in the section of Acknowledgments.

Consulting this list, made available by the journal, each author is qualified due to the article, according to their participation, but the responsibility of each one for the whole of the article is consubstantiated in the approval of the final version to be published. These actions are essential, once being an author means to have responsibility on what is written and on what will be published. Therefore, the authors are held responsible for incorrect results which can be adopted by health professionals in their care and bring irreparable damages to several people. Summing up, it is an ethical matter whether it should be included or not in an article.

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Once the article is submitted and it is under the process of evaluation or editing, in case the removal or addition of an author is required, after the submission of the manuscript or publishing, the same must present an explanation and a statement signed by all the others agreeing with the alterations required, as well as the author who had to be removed from or added to the list⁽¹⁾.

The editors of the journals also have responsibilities in this process. The first one is to explicit to their contributors what is understood as authorship, require from the author to express this contribution in the article; sharing with all the authors and not only with the corresponding author marked in the submission, but also in the handling of the publishing process; keeping updated the rules of follow-up of authorship suggested by the national and international literature; make researches in this published material in the search of possible irregularities of authorship.

The rule of the editor the scientific journal, both as chief editor or section editor, must be oriented by the honesty in the process of submission and evaluation of the articles; the publication must be followed with transparency in this process, and the authorial secrecy must be respected, as well as the evaluators' secrecy; for a tireless pursuit of the technical improvement of the journal; enhancing the visibility of the publishing; and the maintenance of an ethical standard in all those phases.

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