

Lingua Franca and Beyond

Authors and co-authors

This issue of *Medical Writing* is about Authors and Authorship, a topic, which – despite stringent rules and regulations – is sensitive, culturally-dependent and often full of emotion. I guess that we could have endless discussions as to why papers from some regions have close to 20 co-authors, while those from other regions are authored by just a few researchers. We could also, for hours, share different strategies on how to handle heads of departments who hardly know the title of a paper yet insist on being if not the first author then at least the last, senior author. I am sure that a glass (or two) of wine would make our discussions even more vivid and creative.

We, medical writers, frequently witness situations that fall far from the ICMJE guidelines and put us in a rather uncomfortable position. We also quite often have

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to explain what the rules are and why we do not meet the authorship criteria. This, however, is not what I would like to address in this issue of *Lingua Franca and Beyond*, although if you would like to tell us about your own authorship-related experience, how you manage such situations and what your approach is, you are more than welcome. We will publish it in one of the forthcoming *Medical Writing* issues.

In this issue of *Lingua Franca and Beyond*, I would like to introduce Professor Stephen M Shalet from Manchester in the UK. He is one of the leading endocrinologists in the world and an author of numerous articles (PubMed search of 23 November 2015

yielded 427 hits), many of them published in such prestigious journals as *The Lancet*, the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *British Medical Journal*. He was also a co-editor of the first edition of the *Oxford Textbook of Endocrinology*. Professor Shalet writes not only scientific papers but also Hotspur's stories, many of which were published in *The Endocrinologist*. But now Steve describes for us his early lesson on how to select co-authors. This lesson resulted in the formulation of his own guidelines for future collaborations. Is it something to be shared with your co-authors or perhaps you can use his advice to establish a trustful relationship with your clients? ☺

Have fun reading it!

Maria Koltowska-Hägström

Choosing a Collaborator

The project looked a promising one. We planned to determine, using a rat model, if chemotherapy-induced damage to an endocrine gland could be modified by endocrine manipulation induced before and during the period of time that chemotherapy was given. We had an excellent team and everyone was making a significant contribution; there were four of us, Gerry, Ian, me (Steve) and Barry. From a personal perspective, this was my first real attempt to be involved in research studies, which tested a hypothesis as opposed to more clinically orientated observational studies. I felt that potentially it represented a genuine step forward in my research profile and subsequently my hopes were raised further by the fact that within less than 2 years the results of the study supported the initial hypothesis. Thus, it was time to publish our findings and, as a mere clinician involved in basic science experimentation for the first time, I chose to rely on the experience of my senior colleague from the medical school. He chose an American journal with a high impact factor, the referees made

complimentary remarks and the article was duly accepted without any fuss. The only slightly unusual aspect was the request by the journal for the first names of all authors. Previously, I had only published in journals that used authors' surnames and initials but I could not see any problem with the additional use of first names. The proofs were sent to the senior scientist for checking and, therefore, I was not aware of the disaster about to unfold until the article actually appeared in print. This article was going to be the big one, big enough to make my reputation! After months of waiting I sat at my desk and scanned the title page, and authorship: Gerry – Ian – Steve – and Barrington – Barrington! I was scarcely able to take in the full horror of what lay in front of me. Barrington, what a name – everyone called him Barry. Why, oh why, did he have to be called Barrington? I knew immediately my chance of glory had gone. Who on earth is going to pay any attention to a Steve, when there is a Barrington on the team sheet?

It was in the wee hours of the morning following the discovery of my collaborator's real name that I formulated certain absolute resolutions regarding future collaborations.

These guidelines have been as follows: if you do not want unfair competition, never work with anyone with a double-barrelled name, or with the second, third or fourth or even junior placed after their name. In fact never work with anyone with a first name that contains more than five letters!

When you come to consider collaborative research and are thinking about possible collaborators, do not worry about intellect, motivation, capacity to see a project through to completion, writing skills or even the grandeur of their CV. Just demand to see their birth certificate!

Whatever the various contributions of different authors, a 'Steve' will never be noticed in the close vicinity of a 'Sebastian Montmorency' or a 'Montague Kingsley the fourth, junior'. The only alternative, apart from giving up, is a name change, which provides you with an unforgettable moniker, but that is really risky and lays you open to the possibility that the majority of potential collaborators will not choose to work with you!

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