

# EMWA's position on ghostwriting

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On behalf of EMWA

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The European Medical Writers Association would like to make it clear that, contrary to what you may have read in a recently published popular science book, it is not a 'ghostwriters' association'. EMWA is an association for professional medical writers, and deplores ghostwriting. We have published guidelines for the role of medical writers in publications, which make it clear that ghostwriting is unacceptable.<sup>1</sup>

EMWA notes the important distinction between ghostwriting, which is unethical, and professional medical writing assistance, which is legitimate and desirable.<sup>2</sup> Ghostwriting is what happens when someone writes a paper for publication in the medical literature, and neither the identity of the writer nor the funding source of the writing is disclosed to the reader. In contrast, EMWA guidelines state that the contribution of medical writers and their funding source should be made explicit. A medical writer who does not fulfil a journal's authorship criteria, and is therefore not eligible to be listed as an author, must be listed in an acknowledgements section to avoid ghostwriting.

Research evidence shows that the involvement of professional medical writers in publications is associated with fewer retractions for misconduct<sup>3</sup> and better compliance with reporting guidelines.<sup>4</sup>

EMWA is committed to continuing efforts towards the eradication of ghostwriting in the medical literature. Anyone who has any constructive suggestions for how EMWA could more effectively achieve this aim is welcome to contact us.

## References

1. Jacobs A, Wager E. European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) guidelines on the role of medical writers in developing peer-reviewed publications. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2005;21:317-21.
2. Woolley KL. Goodbye Ghostwriters! How to work ethically and efficiently with professional medical writers. *Chest* 2006;130:921-3.
3. Woolley KL, Lew RA, Stretton S, Ely JA, Bramich NJ, Keys JR, *et al.* Lack of involvement of medical writers and the pharmaceutical industry in publications retracted for misconduct: a systematic, controlled, retrospective study. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2011;27:1175-82.
4. Jacobs A. Adherence to the CONSORT guideline in papers written by professional medical writers. *The Write Stuff* 2010;19:196-200.