

**University of Washington School of Medicine
Ghost Authorship Policy
Established August 1, 2007**

BACKGROUND

For purposes of this policy, ghost authorship occurs when a third-party writes or makes substantial changes to an article, ostensibly authored by an academic, without being listed as an author or included in the acknowledgments. The third-party may represent (or be hired by) a company or organization with a vested (financial or political) interest in the topic.

The practice of ghost authorship must be understood within the context of professional authorship standards. Beyond what qualifies as authorship, academic institutions must also consider the purpose of authorship. As defined by JAMA editors: "Authorship in biomedical publications establishes accountability, responsibility, and credit."¹

Journals and academic institutions have widely endorsed the International Committee of Medical Journal Editor's criteria for authorship as a guide for determining who should and should not be considered for authorship. Those criteria are:

- 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and
- 3) final approval of the version to be published.

Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3.²

PURPOSE OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to articulate the standards by which University of Washington (UW) School of Medicine (SOM) faculty and staff will evaluate and represent their authorship in scientific publications.

APPLICATION OF POLICY

This policy applies to all UW SOM faculty, trainees, students, and staff.

POLICY STATEMENT

UW SOM faculty, trainees, students, and staff may not serve as authors on any publications in which ghost authorship has occurred.

¹ Rennie D, Yank V, Emanuel L. When authorship fails: a proposal to make contributors accountable. JAMA. 1997;278:579-585.

² <http://www.icmje.org/>

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

SOM faculty and staff are responsible for understanding and adhering to this and other UW/SOM policies, procedures and guidelines governing the authorship of scientific publications.

SOM department chairs are responsible for disseminating and enforcing applicable UW and SOM policies, procedures and guidelines, including but not limited to this policy. SOM department administrators are delegated authority to oversee dissemination and enforcement activities associated with this and other related policies, procedures and guidelines.

The SOM Dean's office is responsible for interpreting this and other UW and SOM policies, procedures and guidelines, and providing assistance and advice to SOM faculty, department chairs, administrators and entity officials.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is ghostwriting a problem? "The integrity of the published record of scientific research depends not only on the validity of the science but also on honesty in authorship. Editors and readers need to be confident that authors have undertaken the work described and have ensured that the manuscript accurately reflects their work, irrespective of whether they took the lead in writing or sought assistance from a medical writer. The scientific record is distorted if the primary purpose of an article is to persuade readers in favor of a special interest, rather than to inform and educate, and this purpose is concealed."³

What should I do as a writer? If you have contributed substantially to an article, you should be included as an author. If you cannot meet all three criteria of the ICMJE definition of authorship, you should not be included as an author, but might be included in an acknowledgement. Financial arrangements such as source of support for the work and/or writing should be disclosed in the acknowledgements or in some other clearly identifiable manner.

What is my responsibility as an author? Decisions on authorship are usually made by the senior author(s). On some occasions, it might be necessary to consult the departmental chair. Rarely, it might be necessary to seek the advice of the Vice Dean for Research and Graduate Education. If upon review, a formal response is warranted, the UW SOM may request that an erratum notice be sent to the journal to correct errors in a published manuscript.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Flanagin A, Carey LA, Fontanarosa PB, et al. Prevalence of articles with honorary authors and ghost authors in peer-reviewed medical journals. *JAMA*. 1998;280:222-224.

Gotzsche PC, Hrobjartsson A, Johansen HK, et al. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomized trials. *PLoS Medicine*. 2007; 4(1): 0047-0051.

³ World Association of Medical Editors. Ghost Writing Initiated by Commercial Companies. <http://www.wame.org/wamestmt.htm#ghost>. Posted April 19, 2005. Revised June 20, 2005.

Healy D, Cattell D (2003) Interface between authorship, industry and science in the domain of therapeutics. *Br J Psychiatry* 183: 22-27.

Wagner E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. *PLoS Medicine*. 2007; 4(1): 0005-0006.

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