Introduction

• Over the past several years it has become increasingly acknowledged that pharmaceutical companies have a legitimate interest in the publication of the clinical studies they sponsor.

• It is also frequently the case that clinicians and company employees involved in clinical studies have either limited time or limited facility for preparing clear, terse, and well-written manuscripts.

• With this recognition has come an increased understanding that professional medical writers (PMWs) also have a legitimate role in facilitating medical publications.

• As a result, current pharmaceutical industry guidelines emphasize the need to acknowledge the role of PMWs in preparing manuscripts and, thus, avoid the practice of "ghost writing." 4

• However, one potential barrier to implementing these guidelines may be the perception that many medical journals will reject manuscripts that clearly acknowledge PMW support.

Objective

• Assess whether medical journals will review manuscripts acknowledging PMWs.

Methods

Journal Survey

• Journal information was collected from a database of more than 3000 entries (www.pubshub.com), sorted by impact factor, and the top and bottom 100 surveyed via e-mail on October 3−16, 2008.

• The e-mail explained the survey purpose and contained a fictional example acknowledgment as follows:

Acknowledgment: This manuscript was prepared with the aid of Jane Doe, Medical Writer for XYZ Medical Communications Company. Dr. Doe and XYZ were paid by the study sponsor, ABC Pharmaceuticals, for their editorial services during manuscript preparation and revision.

• Journals were requested to provide a Yes or No response to the statement, "Our journal would consider for publication manuscripts that acknowledge the contribution of medical writing professionals."

Results

Journal Characteristics

• Of the 222 journals included in the initial survey, 15 (7%) were clinically focused (Figure 1).

• For the HIF journals, the impact factor ranged from 7.2−48.0.

• For the LIF journals, the impact factor ranged from 0.7−1.0.

Journals were scored as to whether they

• communicated a policy regarding the use of PMWs.

• addressed the issue of PMWs and, if so, whether they did or did not review/publish articles involving PMWs.

Supplemental Data Collection

• Survey data were supplemented by reading and

• statistics on response rates (ie, did/did not accept manuscripts with Yes/No to the statement, "Our journal would consider for publication manuscripts that acknowledge the contribution of medical writing professionals.

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Statistical analyses (ie, did/did not accept manuscripts with Yes/No to the statement, “Our journal would consider for publication manuscripts that acknowledge the contribution of medical writing professionals.”)

Conclusions

• Based on the combined results of e-mail and manual surveys, approximately 75% of the assessed medical journals did not have a clear policy regarding the contributions of industry-sponsored or professional medical writers.

• However, higher impact factor journals are more likely to have a clear policy than lower impact factor journals (P=0.005).

• Among medical journals with a policy, approximately 90% appear to encourage transparency by indicating that paid medical writers should be acknowledged for their contributions in manuscript preparation.

• These data suggest that greater transparency can be achieved by educating medical journal editors and encouraging them to clearly articulate a policy regarding the use of professional medical writers.

References