Tin Man, Lion, and Scarecrow: On the Yellow Brick Road to Successful Author Relations

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Today’s Trip Down the Yellow Brick Road

- What you should do from the start
- Characters you meet along the way
- Obstacles you may encounter
Starting Down the Yellow Brick Road of Manuscript Development
Starting Down the Yellow Brick Road

• Work with authors who have the appropriate expertise
  – Therapeutic area
  – Specialty
  – Drug class

• Verify author’s good standing
  – Debarment lists (FDA, OIG)

• Work with authors who are invested
  – Willing
  – Interested
  – Responsive
What You Should Do From the Start

• Follow best practices
  – Author agreement/engagement letter
  – Kick-off/scope meeting

• Establish expectations
  – Roles
  – Responsibilities
  – Timelines
The Characters You Meet Along the Way…
Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion

- Scarecrow usually promptly responds, often agrees with everything, but does not contribute substantively
- Tin Man is frozen, doesn’t provide any input
- Lion may be timid, afraid to voice an opinion

Early recognition of these character(istics) allows you to take corrective action
Helping Authors Fulfill Their Role: Content

• Draw the author out by
  – Directing a query to a specific author
  – Asking probing questions to solicit participation
  – Giving author time to formulate an answer
  – Posing suggestions that you anticipate author might be contemplating
  – Supplying author with references to assist with eliciting a response

• Document author participation on calls and via email
Helping Authors Fulfill Their Role: Process

- Send out reminders as deadlines approach
- Anticipate sticking points and plan around them (e.g., travel plans that prevent timely review of a draft)
- Work with the author to determine the best communication method
  - email? phone? via the admin? other?
- Use diplomatic, yet direct wording in all communications
- Document, document, document
Helping Authors Fulfill Their Role: Process

• Set realistic expectations regarding selection of a target journal
  – Perform comprehensive comparison of journal parameters
  – Provide compelling arguments for appropriate selection

• Maintain version control
  – Encourage timely response
  – If authors respond too late or in a previous (old) draft, the writer should best capture the intent of the author’s changes and consolidate into current draft
Helping Authors Fulfill Their Role: Process

• Manage a situation where the author expresses desire to write first draft
  – Contact author on a periodic basis, offering assistance with providing references and preparing tables/graphics, with reminders of the need to stay on the project timeline
• …but fails to deliver within agreed-upon timelines
  – Verify that author’s institutional policies do not preclude the use of professional medical writing services
  – Enlist help from a member of medical team who has a personal relationship with the author to offer writing support
  – Clarify with the author differences between ghost-writing and professional medical writing
Lions and tigers and bears… oh my!
Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore!

- Late-stage author request to change/add analyses or objective
  - Call meeting to discuss among all authors
  - Gain consensus that benefits of new approach offset any loss/harm caused by the delay

- Late-stage author addition
  - Discuss/decide among existing authors
    - Previously under-recognized contribution or significant new contribution?
    - Does this person meet ICMJE criteria?
    - Can this be documented?
Put ‘em up, put ‘em up!

- Disagreements between authors on content
  - Hold a teleconference
  - Gather data/references to substantiate the interpretation(s)
  - Reach consensus on a single interpretation using the best scientific information
    OR
  - Acknowledge alternative interpretation when addressing limitations of the study
Outside Influences… aka the Wicked Witch and her Flying Monkeys

• Shifting priorities/timelines
  – Communicate clearly, honestly about the change
  – Seek alternative solutions

• Understanding and meeting journal requirements
  – Initiate collection of required COI and copyright assignment information as early as possible
  – Emphasize to authors the importance of completing these materials
…more Flying Monkeys

• Tight turnaround times for revisions upon acceptance
  – Work with primary author to expedite reviews
  – Distribute proofs to all authors promptly and provide them the opportunity to comment
  – Document approvals/changes and obtain approval from all on final proof
  – Contact journal as early as possible if there will be a need to request an extension of the deadline for revisions
Ask the Wizard
Practical Challenges in Publication Planning: Managing Author Relations