



International Society for Medical Publication Professionals

Official Guidance on Authorship of Peer-review Publications in Which Coronavirus Disease Has Impacted Author Responsiveness

In response to the growing worldwide concern over coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) is providing this Guidance related to byline authorship of peer-review publications and congress presentations, for situations in which author responsiveness has been affected due to COVID-19. This Guidance is developed to aid medical publication professionals in managing authorship situations known to be related to the COVID-19 outbreak and is not intended to apply to other cases of author non-responsiveness. Further, this guidance is intended for time-sensitive research for which non-responsiveness would delay the communication of science. The guidance provided herein is the result of a consensus panel of experts convened to address the issue. This is official guidance from ISMPP, approved by its Board of Trustees, and does not necessarily represent the position of Board member and expert panel employer organizations.

Background

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) provides criteria that have been widely adopted as a standard for determining suitability of researchers to represent authorship in peer-review medical publications, as well as congress presentations.¹ The ICMJE recommends that authorship is based on the following four criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

For instances in which all four criteria are not met by the time of submission/presentation, it is well-established practice to not include the researcher as an author and to consider other representation of contribution, such as acknowledgement. This practice supports the scientific integrity and the proper attribution of contribution to the scholarly work. As a response to the health impacts generated by the COVID-19 outbreak, ISMPP proposes recommendations to preserve the proper attribution of researchers to scholarly work in instances where coronavirus disease has resulted in author non-responsiveness.

Recommendations

ISMPP supports that ICMJE Criterion 1 and Criterion 2 must be met in all instances where a researcher is included as an author. It is critical that there has been a substantial intellectual contribution to the body of research and a material contribution to the resulting peer-review publication. For situations in which there is a candidate for authorship who has previously met ICMJE Criteria 1 and 2, and there is a reasonable rationale to believe that coronavirus disease has contributed to a state of non-responsiveness or inability to complete authorship duties with respect to Criteria 3 and 4, the remaining panel of authors may elect the following course of action in order for the scientific journal or congress to render a final decision.

1. Following a reasonable period of documented attempts to reach the author, proceed with submission to the peer-review journal or congress, including the affected individual as a byline author who has previously achieved ICMJE Criterion 1 and ICMJE Criterion 2. It is understood that inclusion of the individual as an author shall be agreed upon by all authors who have fully met the four ICMJE Criteria. It is further understood that the work can be submitted provided that other authors approve the publication and accept responsibility for the work, as is required by ICMJE Criterion 4.
2. As a matter of full disclosure, provide an accompanying statement to the journal or congress to transparently represent that ICMJE Criterion #3 and/or Criterion #4 were not fully achieved by the affected author.

Medical journal editors and congress officials have the discretion to determine and elect a disposition for the submission, including: 1) accept, 2) reject, 3) adaptation of the byline, and/or 4) publication of a qualifying statement related to authors.

ISMPP provides this Guidance with the expressed intention that it is employed in instances when there has been a *bona fide* and substantial contribution to the research and resulting publication and when failure to include a researcher as an author would represent a lack of transparency for his or her actual contribution to the scholarly work. This Guidance is not intended to diminish the integrity of well-established ICMJE criteria for authorship and should, instead, be referenced as a guidance in **limited circumstances** in which the coronavirus disease, as a pandemic-level health concern, might prevent the disclosure of actual contributions of authors to a submission to medical journals or congresses.

¹Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. <http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>