

Short Communication

Coercive Authorship – Moving Away from Avarice

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Authorship is conceivably a significant aspect of research that recognizes the credit for research and for individual scientists, it is the key and primary criterion for career advancement [1]. Although, it may emerge that giving credit for research would be a straightforward decision, authorship is fraught with many problems in all research disciplines [2].

Head of institutions/departments compelling faculty members for inclusion as authors in research projects conducted within the department has become a practice not so uncommon to find among dental and medical research fraternity in India. The assignment, given that carried out within the department/ institute is the advocated rationale behind the forced authorship. The fact that these projects have to be forwarded through proper channel respective heads of departments for ethical clearances as well as for research funding, encourages further the appalling unethical practise of assertive and coercive authorship.

Individual contributions to research are identified through authorship and integrity in assigning authorship is a critical aspect of the responsible conduct of research [3]. However, issues surrounding integrity of authorship decisions have been estimated to occur in 10-60% of all manuscripts [4-6]. Concerns about the inclusion of individuals who did not contribute to the work and failure to recognize others who did contribute have led journals to adopt guidelines for determining who should be considered an author [3,7].

The problem of authorship is not something of which we are unaware. Several journal editors already recognize this problem and have set and implemented their own standards. However, it is increasingly difficult to recognize and act against forced authorship [8]. Firstly we need to break the line of deniability that the intimidation does not exist. Unprofessional conduct and fraudulent behavior of mandatory authorship surfaces due to practice of annual appraisals being conducted by departments, specifically in public sector which is essential for promotions and advancements in career. The appraiser in many institutions thereby makes it obligatory for their names to be included in list of authors. To oblige the appraiser the individual allows oneself to be used. This nature of practice highlights an

Abstract

Forced authorship is a menace more commonly identified among research community in developing countries. To oblige the institutional and departmental heads the individual allows oneself to be used. This nature of practice highlights an unfavorable impression about the researcher and is detrimental to the science and the scientific community. Scientific community is fragile specifically in developing countries like India and its success demands vigilance, corrective action and a poignant move away from avarice.

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The reprehensible exercise is neither a customary nor a tradition and is also not observed in all the institutes. Although, the despicable rot noted only among few institutions, both public and private, yet has grave potential to proliferate and widen its horizon and henceforth on a priority basis needs to be curtailed. The office of the head need not be ridiculed and neither do we lower the dignity of the venerated office. The message remains that we should learn to walk unencumbered in life. It is the norm which is unfair, unethical and needs to be challenged. Deliberately allowing oneself to be misled should not be the only option with the fraternity. There has to be a right to question and the spirit of ethical innovation should not be allowed to be crushed.

The policy framers and decision makers need to safeguard mechanisms which prevent exploitation of the faculty. . Experience and professional development likely plays a role in assigning authorship. Also, courses in responsible conduct of research can increase understanding of authorship standards [9]. In addition for appraisal to be trusted and considered fair a range of evidence should be taken into account. Transparency needs to be maintained in the functioning of departments; specifically by those at higher levels which inevitably will reduce the menace of intimidated and compelled authorship. Scientific community is fragile specifically in developing countries like India and its success demands vigilance, corrective action and a poignant move away from avarice.

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