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Identification of authors without surnames: is ORCID the right way forward?

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Introduction

In January 2016 an interesting discussion on World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) Listserve was initiated among WAME members. The subject of this discussion was a case of Indian author without a surname and his problems during manuscript submission in a journal. This case presented a completely new aspect of authorship issue to us at *Biochemia Medica*, as until now we have not yet encountered such problem in our Journal. We therefore thought this could be an interesting topic for a discussion in *Biochemia Medica*, since many other cultures have come across different and specific problems regarding their names.

In this issue we thus present contributions by four eminent scientists and editors who have agreed to submit a paper to *Biochemia Medica* and share with our readers their view on this subject. Our aim with this series of short contributions was to raise awareness of the editors, publishers, authors and readers about this issue and to explore different perspectives and opportunities for the identification of authors.

Different views and challenging issues

In his paper, in this issue of *Biochemia Medica*, V. Raveenthiran, the Editor of the *Journal of Neonatal Surgery* and the Associate Editor of the *Indian Journal of Surgery*, provides a nice and comprehensive background of a problem. The world is made up of people belonging to diverse culture and tradition, says prof. Raveenthiran and whereas most authors from Western countries commonly have first and the last name, some other nationalities, like for example South Indians, simply do not have a last name. This becomes a problem when an author is asked to fill in the required fields during the manuscript submission via the online submission system. V. Raveenthiran explains how South Indians are given their names and what are the practical and personal problems and consequences related to this issue for an individual living in the western civilization (1).

With their paper, in this issue of *Biochemia Medica*, Gasparyan *et al.* gave an overview on various identity related problems in different cultures such as Greek, Russian, Iranian and some others (2). Their

paper nicely depicts the scale of the problem and underscores the role of editors and publishers in sharing the responsibility with authors to ensure that each contributor receives proper credits for his/her work and is properly identified with his/her real name. Last but not the least, Gasparyan and colleagues in their paper also provide some guidance for corrections and possible solutions for proper identification through comprehensive evaluation of authors contributing to scientific journals.

Third contribution in this short series of papers is the one by prof. Ana Marusic, Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Global Health* and past Editor-in-chief of the *Croatian Medical Journal*, who has shared her personal experience, related to the identification problems and give some examples of the misuse of authorship in scientific journals (3). In her paper, Ana Marusic raises the question of the responsibility for the identification related problems in scientific journals and calls editors as well as the authors to embrace and adopt the author identifier, as a solution already present and implemented in many journals worldwide. Both Marusic A and Gasparyan AY have provided in their articles the list of personal identifiers, which are available and ready to be used in scholarly community. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned here that the Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) registration page requires that an individual has a last name, as V. Raveenthiran reminded in his paper (1). It seems that although the solutions and opportunities are present, there is still some room for improvement there and problem could not be easily and completely solved just by implementing ORCID, without some further adjustments and fine tuning of the system.

Farrokh Habibzadeh, the Past President of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and Editor and Founder of the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, in his interesting contribution to this series of papers in this issue gives us a provocative and challenging idea of how things may look like in the (near?) future, when artificial intelligence might solve all these issues by collecting, compiling and analysing available data and information and providing necessary information to various parties (4).

The way forward

Our Journal is committed to continuously improve the quality of the editorial work and research integrity is one of the very important aspects of our editorial practice. In one of our recent papers, we have investigated whether authors meet ICMJE authorship criteria in their manuscripts submitted to *Biochemia Medica* and how frequent are authorship violations in submissions containing some type of scientific misconduct (5). With this paper we were able to show that quite large proportion of authors of the manuscripts submitted to *Biochemia Medica* do not meet at least one authorship ICMJE criterion. To address that and to prevent possible authorship disputes we have recently published a policy on authorship in our Journal (6). To protect the identity of the author, we have recently started to offer the possibility to author to provide his/her ORCID number upon registration into the on-line submission system. Unfortunately, our policy does not address the important issue of how authors should be identified in the ORCID database.

Authors need enough identity to be held accountable, meaning not to be easily hidden or confused with others. In some languages and cultures 1, 2, 3, 4, or even 5 names may be routinely applied to individuals. In some cultures, first and last names are together so common as to not be any more distinctive than a single name in other cultures. For example, John Johnson or William Smith or Mohammed Mohammed, or perhaps Kim Lee or Rohit Jain or Jesus Garcia as common names and certainly do not provide unambiguous identification of an individual.

The person's name is what it is. Other personal information such as graduate degree, date of birth, place of birth, mother's birth name, a unique individual identifier (such as the last 4 of 11 digits) of a Social Security Number in the US, or a home or institution address, or a unique email address, etc. could be used to help provide unique specificity. These pieces of information could and should be used to support the author identification and journal editors should have the authority to require

enough information to be provided by the author for publication to assure that accountability.

Obviously, responsibility and accountability to solve this ongoing issue must be shared between editors and authors. It is up to the international associations of journal editors, such as WAME (The World Association of Medical Editors), ICMJE (The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors), EASE (The European Association of Science Editors) and some other, to come up with a solution and guidance on how to permanently solve this issue in a consistent and uniform manner.

Until this issue is solved, we welcome more submissions expressing opinions and experiences related to the problems of the identification of authors in scientific journal. We are interested to learn about this problem from different points of

view: from different ethnic groups and nationalities such as Chinese, Russian, Iranian, from publishers, software developers, editors as well as from our readers.

You are all invited to contribute to this debate. The questions are: should authors necessarily have one first and one last name to be properly identified in scientific Journals? What are the possible solutions for this problem? What could editors and journals do to assist authors? What are possible consequences regarding citation numbers, databases, identifiers such as ORCID?

We are looking forward to your contributions and hope that you will enjoy reading this short series of papers in this issue of *Biochemia Medica*, touching this very sensitive and practical issue of the identity of the authors.

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