

## **(2.5) Addition of author to manuscript**

You are delighted to receive a decision letter regarding a recently submitted manuscript indicating that your article has been accepted pending modifications. The decision letter asks only for a limited number of changes, all of which seem readily addressable. One of the requested edits asks to collect additional clinical data regarding the included patient cohort from the electronic medical record. The medical student who had originally collected much of the clinical data and who was included as an author for the initial submission has graduated and moved to a different institution for residency and is no longer available to look up the additional requested information. A new medical student whom you are mentoring is eager to become involved with radiology research, and this revision seems to provide a natural opportunity for doing so. You solicit his help in looking up the clinical information requested by the journal. The medical student diligently completes the work in a timely fashion, and you are ready to resubmit the paper to the journal incorporating this additional information that the student helped to obtain. To recognize his efforts, you consider including the medical student as a co-author at the time of resubmission. What ethical concern may this raise? What steps should you follow if wishing to further explore this possibility?

### **Commentary**

The International Committee for Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has strict requirements for inclusion as an author, requiring that authors meet all of the following criteria: (1) substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; (2) drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; (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. Individuals meeting these criteria typically are involved with the study from an early stage, so as to have been able to meaningfully satisfy each requirement. Adding an additional author at the time of resubmission raises concerns given that such an individual would not have been involved in original study concept and design, nor in the data collection, analysis, and drafting that contributed to the original manuscript. Rather, an individual first becoming involved at the revision stage typically has a contribution that is more limited in scope in comparison with that of the authors who participated in the study from the outset.

Given these issues, it is important to check with the journal regarding its policy for adding an author at the time of resubmission. Some journals maintain a strict policy that no authorship changes of any form are allowed at this stage, whether an addition, removal, or change in order of authors. Other journals may permit doing so in some circumstances, although typically require a cover letter signed by all authors (not just those authors being added or deleted) that provides the reason for the change. For instance, the addition of an author may be permitted if occurring in direct response to a request by the journal that cannot be met by the current authors (for instance, a request by the journal to seek additional input from a biostatistician or pathologist collaborator) and the added individual is able to legitimately satisfy all four authorship criteria for the revised manuscript. Also, the addition of an author may be permitted if the manuscript decision was categorized as a rejection with allowance of major revisions, in which case the resubmission potentially incorporates substantial changes and may be treated as essentially a new submission (vs. if the original decision was categorized as a minor revision or provisional

acceptance). When an additional author cannot be included, then the contribution of the individual can instead be recognized through an acknowledgment.

In the present case, you should have consulted with the journal regarding its policy for of adding an author at the time of resubmission, prior to soliciting the medical student's input. Given that the scenario describes a provisional acceptance requiring simply adding further background information, it seems unlikely that the revisions will be substantial or involve critical content, and it is likely that the additional author will not be allowed. This information should be disclosed upfront to the medical student prior to his beginning any work, so as not to create false expectations. The student can be informed that he will receive an acknowledgment for his work, which based on the case description appears to represent an appropriate level of credit. Alternatively, one of the current authors included with the original submission may be able to look up the additional material requested by the journal.

## References

- 1) AMA Manual of Style Committee. AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors (10<sup>th</sup> edition). Oxford University Press, March 2015.  
<http://www.amamanualofstyle.com/view/10.1093/jama/9780195176339.001.0001/med-9780195176339-chapter-5> Accessed: December 23, 2015.
- 2) International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors.  
<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html> Accessed: December 23, 2015.
- 3) Elsevier. Authorship complaints. <https://www.elsevier.com/editors/publishing-ethics/perk/authorship-complaints> Accessed: December 23, 2015.
- 4) Council of Science Editors. Addition or Deletion of Author before Publication.  
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