

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/larryhusten/2012/02/14/a-defense-of-professional-medical-writers/>

## **Disclosure is necessary, but not sufficient, when it comes to ethical medical writing assistance**

As professional medical writers (NOT ghostwriters!) we read the guest post from Tom Yates with much interest. We believe that disclosure of medical writing assistance, whether funded from non-commercial or commercial sources, is necessary, but not sufficient, when it comes to ethical medical writing assistance. The practices that professional medical writers follow involve far more than just disclosure!

In this regard, the freely available “anti-ghostwriting” checklist<sup>1</sup> may be of particular interest to Mr Yates and your readers. When authors sign and submit this checklist, they agree that the writer(s) they used can, if requested by a journal editor, “*provide evidence that the manuscript was prepared in accordance with international guidelines for ethical medical writing (e.g., Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals... Good Publication Practice for Pharmaceutical Companies... Position Statements from the European or American Medical Writers Associations or the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals).*”

The World Association of Medical Editors states that “*editors should make clear in their journal’s information for authors that medical writers can be legitimate contributors.*” Evidence is now showing that medical writers are legitimate AND valuable contributors. Manuscripts prepared with professional medical writing assistance are rarely retracted for misconduct,<sup>2</sup> are more compliant with CONSORT guidelines<sup>3</sup> and are accepted more quickly for publication.<sup>4</sup>

Mr Yates raises particular concerns about review articles. As professional medical writers, we assist authors with the often long and laborious effort required to write a review that complies with best practice reporting guidelines (eg, PRISMA). The authors we assist are experts in their field and may receive industry support. We help ensure that financial conflicts of interest are disclosed in a complete and transparent manner. Mr Yates’ proposed solution of banning review articles authored by those with ANY financial conflicts of interest has been tried...and it failed. Indeed, the highly respected New England Journal of Medicine had to change this “blanket ban” policy.<sup>5</sup> The editors explained that “*...our ability to provide comprehensive, up-to-date information, especially on recent advances in therapeutics, has been constrained. The current policy states that “...because the essence of reviews and editorials is selection and interpretation of the literature, the Journal expects that authors of such articles will not have any significant [our emphasis] financial interest in a company (or its competitor) that makes a product discussed in the article.*”

If we want clinicians to have access to timely and high-quality publications from commercial or non-commercial research, then professional medical writers are part of the solution, not the problem.

Professor Karen Woolley

*On behalf of fellow GAPP members Dr Cindy Hamilton, Dr Adam Jacobs, Art Gertel, and Gene Snyder (www.gappteam.org).*

*Disclosures: All GAPP members have or do hold leadership roles at associations representing professional medical writers (eg, AMWA, EMWA, DIA, ISMPP, ARCS), but do not speak on behalf of those organizations. GAPP members have or do provide professional medical writing services to not-for-profit and for-profit clients.*

1. Gøtzsche PC et al. PLoS Med 2009;6(2):e1000023.
2. Woolley KL et al. Curr Med Res Opin 2011;27:1175-1182
3. Jacobs A. Write Stuff 2010;19:196-200
4. Bailey M. AMWA Journal 2011;26:147-152
5. Drazen JM, Curfman GD. NEJM 2002;346:1901-1902