

Dear Dr ten Have,

We, the Global Alliance of Publication Professionals (GAPP; <http://www.ismpp.org/gapp>), monitor and respond to articles that impact upon publication professionals and appreciate Springer's commitment to ethical publication practices. Indeed, your "Publishing Ethics for Journals" guideline notes that "Almost every step in the publishing process involves important ethical principles." We are writing to you about one such step, the citation step, as we believe there has been a case of citation bias in the chapter on ghost writing in the recent Springer e-book *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*.¹ The content published by Springer has been marred by the author's use of selective and outdated citations. Whilst we realize that citation bias is not as alarming as other areas of research waste and misconduct, it is a source of bias that is gaining attention,²⁻³ and we would feel remiss not to highlight our concerns to you. If Springer holds its authors to the highest standards for each step of the publication process and takes action when it sees a problem, Springer and Springer's customers will benefit. We hope the example we describe below helps Springer take appropriate action.

At the outset, we want to state that we are strident and active campaigners for eradicating ghostwriting. We, like Professor Sismondo, believe it is an unethical practice. However, we have major concerns with Professor Sismondo's article on ghostwriting, which include:

- The repeated implication that ghostwriting is common,
- The dismissal of efforts to reduce the incidence of unethical authorship practices (including ghostwriting), and
- The lack of constructive advice to combat ghostwriting.

Clearly, our concerns are based on the author's content and the author's content is based on citations Professor Sismondo has selected. The method for choosing references is not indicated and does not appear to be systematic. Whether intentional or not, the selected references do not reflect the current state of the literature on ghostwriting. The selective use of outdated references has resulted in a published article that misleads Springer's customers on the current prevalence of ghostwriting and the ongoing efforts used to combat it. Even the most basic and quick search of PubMed turns up recent and relevant

references on ghostwriting (see PubMed output below) that have been overlooked by Professor Sismondo.

The abstract opens with the sweeping statement that “Many medical journal articles are ghostwritten and have honorary authors.” Whilst we agree that ghostwriting and honorary (guest) authorship are undesirable practices, a recent systematic review highlights that the prevalence of ghostwriting is currently low and decreasing.⁴ Another recent survey of industry-funded publication practices found that 99% of respondents working in medical writing companies are strictly prohibited from ghostwriting.⁵ Regarding authorship, medical writers are sometimes cited as examples of ghost authors. However, the prevalence is low because medical writers rarely fulfil all four ICMJE authorship criteria (usually only fulfilling the first part of the second criterion, “drafting the work”). It is now widely recognised [by medical journal editors,^{6,7} the pharmaceutical industry,^{8,9} and communication professionals¹⁰⁻¹²] that the contributions of medical writers should be acknowledged and that they only qualify for authorship if they satisfy all four criteria.⁶ There clearly remains a lack of awareness in distinguishing between the ethical, transparent, and legitimate assistance from professional medical writers and the unethical and hidden assistance from ghost writers, but this chapter did not attempt to make this differentiation.

Our second concern regards the dismissal of efforts to reduce the incidence of unethical authorship practices, including ghostwriting, and ghost and guest authoring. “...a ghostwritten article is attributed to those listed as its authors and fails to credit its writers. For example, local power imbalances within a department or laboratory might allow some people to demand authorship and to exclude it from others.” In this example, the author refers to ghost and guest authorship rather than ghost writing, where ghost authorship is an individual who satisfies authorship criteria but is not credited as an author,¹³ and a guest author is someone who is included as an author despite not satisfying authorship criteria. This article fails to recognise the evolution of authorship criteria and the models to improve transparency that have been introduced over the past decade. Codes of ethics and conduct, the educational efforts by professional organizations and an “anti-ghostwriting” checklist¹⁴ are not even mentioned.

Finally, the author allocates most of his chapter to impugning ghostwriters and industry rather than to proposing solutions. A recent systematic review on why authors fail to

publish their research showed that the most frequent and most important reason was “lack of time.”¹⁵ Professional medical writers provide legitimate support for authors, helping them complete many of the time-intensive tasks required to prepare a manuscript for publication.¹⁶ The need to differentiate professional medical writing from ghostwriting is, however, essential and numerous guidelines to direct the ethical behaviour of authors and all contributors are now available and should be recognised.¹⁷

In the opinion of GAPP, whereas the subject of ghosts (writers, authors, managers and researchers) is worthy of discussion, all the efforts of medical journal editors, the pharmaceutical industry, professional associations and governments to eliminate these practices over the past decade have to be presented. We suggest that when the next edition of the *Encyclopedia* is commissioned, that a more balanced and current viewpoint is published, without the appearance of selective citation.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Global Alliance of Publication Professionals (www.gappteam.org)

Julia Donnelly, PhD; Julia Donnelly Solutions Ltd, Ashbourne, UK; Art Gertel, MS, President, MedSciCom, LLC, Lebanon, New Jersey, USA, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Innovation in Regulatory Science (CIRS); Cindy W. Hamilton, PharmD, ELS, Assistant Clinical Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy, Richmond; Hamilton House Medical and Scientific Communications, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA; Jackie Marchington, PhD, CMPP, Director of Operations, Caudex, Oxford, UK; Serina Stretton, PhD, CMPP, Scientific Solutions Lead, ProScribe – Envision Pharma Group, Australia; Karen Woolley, PhD, CMPP, Division Lead, Proscribe – Envision Pharma Group, Noosa Heads, Australia; Adjunct Professor, University of the Sunshine Coast, Adjunct Professor, University of Queensland, Australia

Copy to Harmen van Paradijs, Vice President Human Sciences Publishing

References

1. Sismondo S. Ghostwriting. In Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015. DOI10.1007/978-3-319-05544-2_215-2
2. Sawin VI, Robinson KA. Biased and inadequate citation of prior research in reports of cardiovascular trials is a continuing source of waste in research. J Clin Epidemiol. 2015 Jun 15. pii: S0895-4356(15)00304-2.
3. Kivimäki M, Batty GD, Kawachi I, Virtanen M, Singh-Manoux A, Brunner EJ. Don't let the truth get in the way of a good story: an illustration of citation bias in epidemiologic research. Am J Epidemiol. 2014;180(4):446-8.
4. Stretton S. Systematic review on the primary and secondary reporting of the prevalence of ghostwriting in the medical literature. BMJ Open. 2014;4(7):e004777.
5. Wager E, Woolley KL, Adshead V et al. Awareness and enforcement of guidelines for publishing industry-sponsored medical research among publication professionals: the Global Publication Survey. BMJ Open. 2014;4(4):e004780.
6. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: writing and editing for biomedical publication. 2014. (Accessed Feb 23, 2015, at <http://www.icmje.org/index.html>.)
7. Committee on Publication Ethics. Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. 2010. (Accessed Feb 23, 2015, at http://publicationethics.org/files/International%20standards_authors_for%20website_11_Nov_2011.pdf.)
8. Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. Principles on conduct of clinical trials and communication of clinical trial results. 2014. (Accessed Feb 23, 2015, at http://phrma.org/sites/default/files/pdf/042009_clinical_trial_principles_final_0.pdf.)
9. Battisti WP, Wager E, Baltzer L, et al. Good Publication Practice for Communicating Company-Sponsored Medical Research: GPP3. Ann Intern Med. 2015 Aug 11. doi: 10.7326/M15-0288.

10. Hamilton CW, Royer MG. AMWA Position Statement on the Contributions of Medical Writers to Scientific Publications. *AMWA J* 2003;18(1):13-5.
11. Jacobs A, Carpenter J, Donnelly J, et al. The involvement of professional medical writers in medical publications: results of a Delphi study. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2005;21:311-6.
12. International Society for Medical Publication Professionals. Code of ethics. 2013. (Accessed Aug 12, 2015, at http://www.ismpp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116:code-of-ethics-a&catid=20:site-content&Itemid=169)
13. Rennie D, Flanagin A. Authorship! Authorship! Guests, ghosts, grafters, and the two-sided coin. *JAMA*. 1994 271(6):469-71.
14. Gøtzsche PC, Kassirer JP, Woolley KL, et al. What should be done to tackle ghostwriting in the medical literature? *PLoS Med* 2009;6(2):e23.
15. Scherer RW, Ugarte-Gil C, Schmucker C, Meerpohl JJ. Authors report lack of time as main reason for unpublished research presented at biomedical conferences: a systematic review. *J Clin Epidemiol*. 2015;68(7):803-10.
16. Global Alliance of Publication Professionals, Woolley KL, Gertel A, Hamilton C, Jacobs A, Snyder G. Poor compliance with reporting research results - we know it's a problem ... how do we fix it?. *Curr Med Res Opin*. 2012;28(11):1857-60.
17. <http://www.equator-network.org/>. Accessed 23 July 2015

Screenshot of basic PubMed search on “ghostwriting” – On what basis were these relevant and recent references excluded?

The screenshot shows the PubMed search interface. At the top, the NCBI logo and navigation links are visible. The search bar contains the term "ghostwriting" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are options for "Create RSS", "Create alert", and "Advanced".

The left sidebar contains various filters and options, including "Article types", "Text availability", "PubMed Commons", "Publication dates", "Species", and "Clear all".

The main content area displays the search results. At the top of the results, it says "Results: 1 to 20 of 70". Below this, there are six search results listed, each with a checkbox, a title, author information, journal information, and PMID. The results are:

- [Ethical issues in gastroenterology research.](#)
1. Eastwood GL.
J Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2015 Mar;30 Suppl 1:8-11. doi: 10.1111/jgh.12755.
PMID: 25827797
[Similar articles](#)
- [Systematic review on the primary and secondary reporting of the prevalence of ghostwriting in the medical literature.](#)
2. Stretton S.
BMJ Open. 2014 Jul 14;4(7):e004777. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2013-004777.
PMID: 25023129 **Free PMC Article**
[Similar articles](#)
- [Big pharma and the problem of disease inflation.](#)
3. Gabriel JM, Goldberg DS.
Int J Health Serv. 2014;44(2):307-22.
PMID: 24919306
[Similar articles](#) [1 comment](#)
- [Hiring a professional medical writer: is it equivalent to ghostwriting?](#)
4. Das N, Das S.
Biochem Med (Zagreb). 2014 Feb 15;24(1):19-24. doi: 10.11613/BM.2014.004. eCollection 2014.
PMID: 24627711 **Free PMC Article**
[Similar articles](#)
- [Differential diagnosis: distinguishing between ghostwriting and professional medical writing in biomedical journals--reply.](#)
5. Bosch X.
JAMA Intern Med. 2013 Dec 9-23;173(22):2092-3. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.10387. No abstract available.
PMID: 24322465
[Similar articles](#)
- [Differential diagnosis: distinguishing between ghostwriting and professional medical writing in biomedical journals.](#)
6. Hamilton CW.
JAMA Intern Med. 2013 Dec 9-23;173(22):2091-2. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.10420. No abstract available.

Screenshot of basic PubMed search on “medical writing AND ethics” – On what basis were these relevant and recent references excluded?

NCBI Resources How To

PubMed.gov
US National Library of Medicine
National Institutes of Health

PubMed Search

Create RSS Create alert Advanced

Article types Summary 20 per page Sort by Most Recent Send to

Review

Customize ...

Text availability

Abstract

Free full text

Full text

Publication dates

5 years

10 years

Custom range...

Species

Humans

Clear all

Show additional filters

Results: 1 to 20 of 31

1. [Exploring the attitudes of medical faculty members and students in Pakistan towards plagiarism: a cross sectional survey.](#)
Rathore FA, Waqas A, Zia AM, Mavrinac M, Farooq F.
PeerJ. 2015 Jun 18;3:e1031. doi: 10.7717/peerj.1031. eCollection 2015.
PMID: 26157615 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

2. [Disadvantages of publishing biomedical research articles in English for non-native speakers of English.](#)
Rezaeian M.
Epidemiol Health. 2015 May 1;37:e2015021. doi: 10.4178/epih/e2015021. eCollection 2015. Review.
PMID: 25968115 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

3. [Plagiarism detection softwares: useful tools for medical writers and editors.](#)
Rathore FA, Farooq F.
J Pak Med Assoc. 2014 Nov;84(11):1329-30. No abstract available.
PMID: 25831681
[Similar articles](#)

4. [Postgraduate pharmacology curriculum in medical institutions in India: time for need-based appraisal and modifications.](#)
Badyal DK, Desai C, Tripathi SK, Dhaneria SP, Chandy SJ, Bezbaruah BK.
Indian J Pharmacol. 2014 Nov-Dec;46(8):584-9. doi: 10.4103/0253-7613.144903.
PMID: 25538327 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

5. [Publication practices and standards: recommendations from GSK Vaccines' author survey.](#)
Camby I, Delpire V, Rouxhet L, Morel T, Vanderfinden C, Van Driessche N, Poplazarova T.
Trials. 2014 Nov 18;15:446. doi: 10.1186/1745-6215-15-446.
PMID: 25406766 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

6. [Systematic review on the primary and secondary reporting of the prevalence of ghostwriting in the medical literature.](#)
Stretton S.
BMJ Open. 2014 Jul 14;4(7):e004777. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2013-004777.
PMID: 25023129 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

7. [Awareness and enforcement of guidelines for publishing industry-sponsored medical research among publication professionals: the Global Publication Survey.](#)
Wager E, Woolley K, Adshead V, Cairns A, Fullam J, Gonzalez J, Grant T, Tortell S.
BMJ Open. 2014 Apr 19;4(4):e004780. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2013-004780.
PMID: 24747794 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

8. [Hiring a professional medical writer: is it equivalent to ghostwriting?](#)
Das N, Das S.
Biochem Med (Zagreb). 2014 Feb 15;24(1):19-24. doi: 10.11613/BM.2014.004. eCollection 2014.
PMID: 24827711 Free PMC Article
[Similar articles](#)

9. [In response: the ethics and value of professional medical writing assistance.](#)
Weber MA, Fonseca R, Stossel TP.
Endocr Pract. 2013 Mar-Apr;19(2):379-80. No abstract available.
PMID: 23512399
[Similar articles](#)