

# Review of: "Honorary Authorship in Biomedical Journals: The Endless Story"

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This is an interesting editorial and draws attention to what is apparently an increasing problem. It would be helpful if the author were to distinguish between “guest” and “ghost” authors. The former are ones who have made no real contribution to the ms, and the latter are ones who have done so, but have not been credited with a by-line. The problem is that it is very hard both to ascertain whether a given author has made a significant contribution (and what is “significant” anyway?) and to discipline them. Is there any way in which some names of guest authors can be removed by editors who are suspicious of their contributions? There are also problems with some very senior researchers, often department heads, who insist that they are named on all publications from their departments. This practice is more prevalent in some countries than others, and a few egotistical department heads are associated with so many papers that they would not have had time even to read them.

However, the nature of modern science means that some research projects do involve very large teams of people. The physics papers from CERN in Geneva, and some clinical trials papers that involve patients in many different countries, are examples. The latter can on occasion mean that the space devoted to the names and addresses of all the co-authors is greater than the paper's text. So the expansion in average author numbers referenced by the author is not necessarily a sign of guest authorship.

The author's suggestion that medical journal editors should insist on a statement of the contributions of individual authors is good, and the list of possible contributions might with advantage be pruned so that mere approval of the final ms is not regarded as sufficient to merit authorship.