

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

Penelope Engel-Hills<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cape Peninsula University of Technology

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

The review requested was for an article and the rating is for publication of a scientific paper. Should this be an editorial or letter to the editor, as indicated in some of the earlier reviews, my apologies for the misunderstanding and the rating would be different. Furthermore, in this review, repetition of the helpful comments of other reviewers is avoided as far as possible, but to clarify my impression; this piece, as it now stands, is in the category of non-research and more in the style of an 'opinion piece'. If acceptable to the journal this short paper (with some additional processing and revision) could be of value to the academic community to stimulate further conversation and promote research.

The topic of discussion is relevant and of interest and the limited information provided demonstrates logical thought, although this paper would be improved by the provision of clarity on the purpose and the thinking process/es applied. For example, ethics is alluded to so approaching this topic as an ethical dilemma within the community of biomedical (or broader) authors and elaborating on the ethical components more fully could build the paper into a substantive academic article. This means that with further development the paper has a potential contribution to make to the conversations related to honorary co-authorship. However, at this stage the paper is insufficient as a scientific publication, with no empirical data, scientific structure, or rigorous/systematic review of current literature, should the latter have been the intended methodological approach.

It is recommended that the author consider a more structured approach with extension of all the good points raised. As previously stated, one possible framing would be through an ethical lens. But whatever framework is chosen, the option to retain (and expand) on the helpful, but under explored, advantages and challenges with honorary authorship is encouraged as this could be the core of any restructured paper. In revision of the positive and negative aspects, the contribution would be multiplied by deep thinking and so for example, under what conditions can the dilution of contribution of each author fall into the category of honorary authorship as defined i.e. when is the contribution insignificant and not sufficient for co-authorship? Also thinking more deeply as to whether concern for the reputation and integrity of an honorary author (unethical authorship by some accounts) is justifiable might uncover some interesting alternative thoughts.

In the deeper thinking there may be the opportunity to offer more nuanced insights into the simplistic evaluation of author contribution by the number of authors listed. In a climate where the problems of the world are acknowledged as complex and needing inter/transdisciplinary research teams, often across a number of research sites, it is not inevitable that a long list of authors is indicative of honorary authorship. Having presented a paper with this interesting topic, the author will

have read widely and have reflected on the topic at some depth. Offering of more pertinent recommendations to journals, researchers and authors would be a contribution knowledge building in this area. There are a number of routes to get there but in the end what is needed is an expansion of this worthy contribution that justifies publication and elicits interest for others to take the next step.

The language style is suitable however a language edit is recommended.