

CHAPTER 9

DECIDING ON CO-AUTHORSHIP

Guidelines, Not Mandates

In the previous chapter, we summarized the prevailing guidelines that have increasingly become accepted as important factors to consider in making decisions concerning authorship/co-authorship. While these guidelines are certainly helpful, it should be emphasized that they should not be considered to be “written in stone”. There are often multiple mitigating circumstances that can, and probably should, influence final decisions. Nevertheless, there are a number of practical considerations regarding co-authorship, that must always be considered, including who should and who should not be included as co-authors, and what the order of listed authors should be. Any requirements of the author’s academic or institutional affiliation, and requirements of the journal to which the manuscript will be submitted, also need to be considered. Finally, there will usually be personal and political considerations which should not be ignored. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss some of these considerations.

In addition to the guidelines recommended by the Huth committee, other organizations have established specific guidelines for inclusion of individuals as co-authors on a biomedical publication. For example, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), a highly influential organization which has contributed important commentary and policy guidelines relative to many key issues regarding biomedical publications, recommended in 2015 (<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/>) that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria (which are not significantly different from the recommendations of the Huth Committee):

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
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.”

Many academic organizations and research institutions have also adopted policies that address authorship issues. One notable example of this is the National Institutes of Health. With regard to the Intramural program, the NIH has formulated a specific policy on co-authorship that adopts virtually all of the Huth Committee and International Committee of Medical Journal Editors guidelines.

In addition, the NIH Guidelines for the Conduct of Research state that: “individuals who have assisted in the research by their encouragement and advice, or (by) providing space, financial support, reagents, occasional analyses or patient materials, should be acknowledged in the text, but not be authors.” While