

Authorship Policy For Written Outputs From The NZCMS, SoFIE-Health And Other Social Epidemiology Research Centre Projects (as at 10th November 2003)

To provide clarity about authorship and authorship order, the following policy has been developed for outputs of the NZCMS, SoFIE-Health and other Social Epidemiology Research Centre projects.

1. We will follow the Vancouver criteria

“Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for the content. Authorship credit should be based on substantial contributions to:

- a) conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of data; **and** to*
- b) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; **and on***
- c) final approval of the version to be published.*

Conditions a), b), and c) must all be met. Any part of an article critical to its main conclusions must be the responsibility of at least one author. Editors may require authors to justify the assignment of authorship.”

2. Wherever possible, we will explicitly state contributorship

Authorship serves a dual role. First, it is a means of obtaining **credit** in the academic world - promotion, invitations to conferences, and funding all to some extent are measured by a person’s publications. Second, it is a means of assigning **responsibility** - the authors must be answerable and responsible for the results.

To assign both credit and responsibility, many journals now require or encourage explicit statements of contributorship. We will follow this system wherever possible.

One author, usually the first author, will take the overall responsibility of ‘guarantor’ of the written output. However, specific individual roles and responsibilities remain identifiable under contributorship. Occasionally, it may be appropriate for two authors to be co-guarantors (e.g. supervisor and student).

There may be occasions where group authorship is simplest and appropriate. For example, “New Zealand Census-Mortality Study team” denoted as sole author. (However, this option should only be used where it is difficult to clearly identify named authors to appear in the by-line, and when all member of the group agree to this option.) Should this group authorship approach be used, then the contributor statements take on greater importance.

3. Authorship order will be on the basis of importance of contribution

There is no universally agreed way to assign authorship order. Journals are not usually explicit in their advice to authors.

We will attempt to follow the recommendation of Rennie et al (1997):

“The colleagues having agreed on their respective contributions, should list their names systematically - in the [author] byline and in the contributorship list - according to the relative importance of their duties: in descending order, starting with the collaborator who made the most substantial contributions.”

Note that this ordering requires first agreeing on contributorship.

A common practice in some disciplines and institutions is that the Head of Department, leader of the given study, or such senior researcher to routinely be the last author. Further, more credit (e.g. during promotion reviews) may be assigned to the last author than to second, third, etc authors. Accordingly, we will endeavour to include as the last sentence in the contributorship sections of written outputs the following: “Authorship order was assigned on the basis of relative importance of their duties, in descending order, starting with the author who made the most substantial contributions.” The purpose of this sentence is transparency.

Should the number of authors be very large, it may only be practical to order the first two or three authors by importance of contribution, and order remaining authors, say, alphabetically. If this were done, the above-proposed sentence on order in the contributorship section would be amended to state this.

Resources

1. Rennie D, Yank V, Emanuel L. When authorship fails. *JAMA* 1997;278:579-585.
2. Smith R. Authorship is dying: long live contributorship. *BMJ* 1997;315:696.