




## Responsibilities of authors<sup>1,2</sup>

Charles H Halsted, Editor-in-Chief

Beginning this year, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* will institute new requirements for authors, which are described in the revised "Information for Authors" that appears in this issue. These new requirements address the responsibilities of authors that relate to 1) identification of individual contributions to the published work and 2) full disclosure of real or potential conflicts of financial or personal interest with the financial sponsor of the scientific project. By instituting these new requirements, we are in compliance with the publication ethics of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors that are excerpted in a recent editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1). Henceforth, each prospective Journal author will be required to list his or her specific contributions and potential conflicts of interest in the Acknowledgment section of each submitted manuscript.

These new policies were developed in discussions with the Editorial Board to best preserve the scientific integrity of the Journal, to ensure truthfulness in communication with the readers, and to protect the scholarship rights and reputations of each author. We agree with the journal editors who signed the *New England Journal of Medicine* editorial stating that each prospective author must concur with the presentation and interpretation of all data in the submitted manuscript to meet the essential requirements of authorship, which include accountability, independence from undue influence, and intellectual property. The Journal, its readers, and its authors will all benefit from full disclosure of each author's role in the submitted work—the Journal by a higher assurance of scientific integrity, the readers by full appreciation of the contribution of each author, and the authors by identification of the extent of his or her scholarship. Although it is customary to assign significance to the first and last (senior) author, the new policy will permit an accurate distribution of credit to each and every author. This policy will permit a more accurate evaluation of each author for academic advancement or other scientific appraisal and will protect each author from the perception of trivial contribution, or worse, from "gift authorship."

We concur with the signatories to the *New England Journal of Medicine* editorial that each author must provide full disclosure in the Acknowledgment section of any financial or personal interest in any company or organization sponsoring the research. Such potential conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to, serving as an expert witness or public advocate, advisor, consultant, grantee, employee, board member, or officer of the sponsoring company or organization. We believe that the field of clinical nutrition is especially at risk for challenges to scientific objectivity and integrity because, by their very nature, for-profit company sponsors have in mind successful product marketing as their ultimate goal. For example, we wish to avoid the potential situation in which the sponsoring company slants the interpretation of data from a multicenter and multiauthored clinical trial. The serious concern of this approach is underscored by the fact that published clinical trials are typically the ultimate basis for product approval by the Food and Drug Administration and by which practicing physicians make their clinical decisions. While protecting the readers and the public from biased information and the scientific integrity of the Journal, full disclosure will also protect each author from any perception of undisclosed bias.

Finally, Journal readers should know and appreciate that our editorial procedures, including the selection and expectations of reviewers, will continue to conform at all times to the same principles of objectivity as applied to authors. The peer review process requires that editors and reviewers recuse themselves from evaluating manuscripts submitted by authors within the same institution, who are their present or recent colleagues, or who have a conflict of interest with the sponsoring company or organization. Ultimately, these new procedures can only enhance the stature of the Journal and its reputation for truthful and objective scientific excellence. 

### REFERENCE

1. Davidoff F, DeAngelis CD, Drazen JM, et al. Sponsorship, authorship, and accountability. *N Engl J Med* 2001;345:825–7.

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