Author's response to reviews

Title: Why do you think you should be the author on this manuscript? Analysis of open-ended responses of authors in a general medical journal

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Mr Ulep and Dr McNamee,

We thank the reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions concerning our manuscript. We have addressed all their issues as follows:

**Reviewer 1: Ljiljana Vuckovic-Dekic**

Dr Vuckovic-Dekic has raised no issues concerning our manuscript, and again we would like to thank her for her praise of our study.

**Reviewer 2: Lorraine Ferris**

Dr Ferris has raised 1 major and 4 minor issues:

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. Research Questions or Research Objectives. Articulating research questions or research objectives will organize and focus the results and discussion and increase the impact of the paper. The statement in the abstract and conclusion that “authorship criteria and the practice of contribution declarations should be revised in order to capture those deserving authorship in biomedical research” could be re-framed into either research questions or research objectives. The current authors might want to identify different research questions or research objectives.

   **Answer:** We agree with the reviewer comment, and have rephrased the objectives of the study in the Background section of the Abstract, the Background section, as well as the Discussion and the Conclusion section.

**Minor Essential Revisions**

2. Clarity about the sample. Participants are said to be all authors who submitted manuscripts to the Croatian Medical Journal (March 2009 to July 2010) however, elsewhere it says that participation was voluntary and authors could opt-out of participating. The abstract reports 1425 authors submitting 345 papers but the number of responses analyzed is 1282 authors (submitting 345 papers). Is it perhaps the case that the 140 authors who did not fill in the authorship question were actually those who opted-out of participating (this makes sense since in the discussion it says that all authors must complete the authorship form)? A clearer description of participants is needed (and the participation rate) and changes made accordingly to the abstract and the text of the paper.

   **Answer:** The authors (n=140) who did not fill in the authorship question did agree to partake in the study as they had signed a statement that allowed the use of the forms in editorial research. This is now indicated more clearly in the revised manuscript.

3. **More discussion about the meaning of the data.** The paper raises some very interesting questions about authorship and the current authors are in a unique position, given their expertise, to be able to offer some insight. What do the current authors think of the stated contributions in Table 3 and S1? Clearly some of the answers were not clear enough to determine if authorship was deserved, but in other cases, did the current authors think that the threshold for authorship was met based only on the statements?

   **Answer:**
The aim of our study was not to see whether the authors satisfied ICMJE criteria but to analyze their open-ended declarations that were given without reference to any existing criteria. We assessed how much the contributions declared in such a situation matched those from the ICMJE criteria, without making judgments on deserving authorship. This is now hopefully made clearer in the Discussion section.

We don’t think there should be a threshold for authorship but that we need a revision of the criteria. As our study was not designed to test these issues, we did not want to take the discussion in the direction too far outside of the research questions in the study. Our current research is focused on the role of editors and other stakeholders in research in assuring the transparency of authorship, particularly in clinical trials.

4. MINOR ISSUES NOT FOR PUBLICATION: Abstract reports 54.5% but it is 54.2% in Table 1(15.6 +38.6). Table S1 needs a statement that 1= ICMJE 1 criteria; 2 = ICMJE 2 criteria, etc.

Answer:
We have corrected the abstract to state 54.2% and added the explanation of the table header regarding the ICMJE criteria to the footnote of the table.

Discretionary Revisions
5. Consider adding a section in the discussion on recommendations for journals/editors. Given that the current authors are experienced editors, I think it would be valuable for them to list their recommendations. For example, use an open-ended contribution declaration with a check-list in order to elicit richer information that will help to identify deserving authors from non-deserving ones.

Answer:
We thank the reviewer for the comment – we have included the recommendations at the end of the Conclusion in the Discussion section.

All changes are underlined in the revised manuscript.
We hope that the revised manuscript will be acceptable for publication.
Thank you again for the privilege of submitting our work to BMC Medical Research Methodology.

Sincerely,
Ana Marušić