Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 20 November 2012

Reviewer: Lorraine Ferris

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer’s Report
This is a very interesting and important paper on a topic relevant to journals, readers and authors. The data is unique and provides insight into what authors report as being their contributions to a paper. Below are comments to the authors that are organized in sections required by BMC Medical Research Methodology.

To avoid any confusion, the authors of this paper are referred to as “current authors” to distinguish them in this review from authors who participated in this research.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

Level of Interest

This article is of importance to the field.

Quality of written English

Acceptable

Statistical Review

The manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests

I have no competing interests.

Recommendation

Accept pending revisions.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

None