Reviewer's report

Title: Five-Step Authorship Framework to Improve Transparency in Disclosing Contributors to Industry-sponsored Clinical Trial Publications

Version: 1 Date: 28 August 2014

Reviewer: T Lemmens

Reviewer's report:

Overall comments: this is an interesting, original paper, discussing both an interesting study conducted on perceptions of authorship in industry-sponsored research and recommendations for a new approach to the determination of authorship by an external committee. The results of the study are well presented and discussed and the methodology and analysis seem credible.

There is value in the proposal for a five step approach to authorship, and it deserves a full discussion in the relevant literature. I am not sure I agree with the resistance against providing more detailed guidance in guidelines or authorship rules of journals with respect to what constitutes substantial contribution, rather than allowing a committee to decide on a more ad hoc basis what will constitute substantial contribution. Committees could be manipulated (e.g. by the sponsor or lead investigators), or there could be a power dynamic in these committees which results in legitimate authors to be excluded and authors who do not deserve it to get authorship status. Yet, as a result of the mere procedural respect of the five step project, there would be no way to challenge authorship decision making. Authorship is very much about providing a reliable public representation of the study and the analysis and drafting process. But if these committees can create their own criteria for ‘substantial contribution’, there is perhaps not more clarity about what exactly happened with respect to the contributions of a study.

Another comment is that the term transparency is particularly used in the context of access to research data and access to hidden information. Would it not be better to use the term ‘clarity’ with respect to the identification of who did what with respect to authorship?

These are more comments for further reflection. The paper should stimulate some interesting further discussion on authorship.

Final assessment: minor essential (primarily stylistic) revisions for issues below:

Detailed comments where some correction of clarification appears needed:

p. 4:

Sentence: “The most common and frequently referenced authorship guidelines in biomedicine are issued by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), with the goal of enhancing transparency in authorship disclosure and
ultimately building trust and credibility with the medical literature readership [2-3]."

Problem with ‘with the goal’. : structure of sentence unclear. Suggest cut in two sentences. Second one “The goal of the ICMJE is…”

“erode credibility in industry research” only in industry research?

“the diversity unscientific research” Add: “of”?

“to elevate trust, transparency, and integrity in publishing industry-sponsored studies” should be : ‘a collaboration aimed at…”

p. 8: “all respondents selected ICMJE as their top choice, although to a smaller extent by clinical investigators” “by clinical investigators” not correct in this sentence: perhaps better: ‘although this was less the case among clinical investigators”/

p.9 : “ICMJE criteria for authorship available at the time of the survey [19] were unclear as to whether patient recruitment was considered to be a substantial contribution as part of data acquisition.” Is this really so? Patient recruitment is not mentioned as an example in ICMJE suggesting it is not sufficient.

p. 10: it is not clear to me why this case represents a case of prioritizing ‘transparency’ over proprietary information. This should be clarified.

p. 14: and develop: suggest to add ‘to’ before develop

p. 14: structure of following sentence is not ok: “are more often concerned with the importance or significance of the contribution rather than following..” [ are concerned… rather than following : following not correct here] The sentence is also not clear.

p. 16: “with respondents potentially having a special interest in authorship and therefore not representative.” Structure sentence: ‘not being representative’…

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no conflicting interests in the review of this manuscript