

Ghost Writing and Plagiarism

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According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) following four criteria need to be fulfilled for declaring a person author; "1) substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work, 2) drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content, 3) final approval of the version to be published, 4) agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved".¹

The term non author contributor is used for persons who don't fulfill above mentioned criteria but may have helped with reference to funding Supervision, and editing etc. ¹ An acknowledgement is to be made for such contribution in the work, article or book. Names of such helpers is not indexed in data bases with reference to the concerned work, article or book.

Ghost writing means that an individual write for another person who is considered to have written these.² It is also called contract cheating. Anything especially autobiographies, books, assignments, articles, and speeches can be ghost written. Why someone opt for ghost writing is interesting. Some get it as they don't have time because of busy schedules, others consider that although their narrative is important and interesting but they do not have sufficient time to write or what they will write will not be impressive or up to mark. Economic gain, job and friendship are common reasons for which a ghost writer allows other to take credit of his work. As everywhere, ghost writing culture is also there in Pakistani scenario. Speeches of politicians and government officials are written by persons who may be hired or are employed in the concerned department. It has been said that biographies of two of the former Pakistani heads of state were written by ghost writers.³

Medical ghost writer term has been used with the context of studies or articles authored by someone else for another particular person under the umbrella of a pharmaceutical company. ⁴ It is however one form of plagiarism that has many components. In this context one need to keep in mind plagiarism definition i.e., "wrongful appropriation, stealing and publication of another author's language, thoughts, ideas or expressions and the representation of them as one's original work".⁵ Interestingly a plagiarist is thief who steal someone's work while in ghost writer willingly gives credit of his work to some else.

Medical ghost writing and plagiarism as everywhere is there in our scenario as well. It can be divided into various forms. Commonest version is the cut paste technique in which contents from someone else work is used with plagiarist's name. Another common form practiced now a days is to get synopsis and dissertation for post graduate examination preparation by ghost writers. This kind of ghost writing has gained popularity.⁶ Ghost writers get hefty payments in this regard. In another case one requests colleagues or friend working on some project or study to include his/her name in the list of authors without any contribution. In another scenario, seniors force juniors who are conducting research to include their name in research as authors. This may be up to such extent that they want to be first author.

Morality and ethics compliance, monitoring, and punitive actions are main mechanisms for avoiding and controlling ghost writing/plagiarism. Plagiarism trend is expected to decrease due to widespread use of plagiarism scanning soft wares and policies of controlling/regulatory bodies like Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan's. It is to be noted that Vice Chancellors and Rectors of Universities/Institutes have been penalized in this regard.^{7, 8} There is however long way to go for synopsis/dissertation ghost writing, guest authoring, and forceful inclusion in authors list free culture. Punishments cannot stop this problem. This requires multiple interventions like education, counseling, and facilitation.

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Authors Contributions

Muhammad Khurram: Conception of idea, Literature review and manuscript writing

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