Editorial

Gifting authorship, a gesture of gratification, a bribe or an act of corruption??



Scientific publications in National or International peer reviewed journal are considered as measure of higher professional standing, research ability and the knowledge. Health care and medical education monitoring bodies like MCI & DCI give positive wieghtage to publication as a measure of academic performance and expertise.

It has been an established fact, that some doctors have been accepting lucrative/expensive gifts for prescribing medicine or carrying out ethical drug trials for pharmaceutical companies or even accept share out of investigation fees from professional colleagues contrary to the International code of medical ethics and the Geneva declaration.

Recently surveys published in the Indian journal of Medical discipline point out that the doctors are now being gifted authorship in journals of repute, even if they have made no contribution to the research. Gifting authorship is becoming prevalent form of misconduct or source of corruption in biomedical publication amongst researcher. In a survey published in the Indian journal of Ethics, as reported by Pushpa Narayan in Times of India, nearly 65% of Doctors admitted that they were witness to it. More than half the doctors surveyed said they had seen falsification of data and plagiarism in a questionnaire based study on 156 researchers from across India between August 2012 and March 2013. This practice is more common in faculty members of Medical/Dental colleges where the pressure to publish is more than in non academic institutions. In many institutions senior researcher/Heads of departments assume and take it granted that by virtue of being senior/HOD, they automatically qualify to be either first author or one of the co-authors even if he/she has made no contribution. Though this is not absolutely new, a senior scientist was disqualified from becoming a head of a research centre only because he had many such publications. It was a gross misconduct. This malpractice has multiplied because the benefits of publications have increased.

The researchers who gift authorship are mostly the postgraduate students. Many a times, they are compelled to do so under pressure of the professors/guides or other staff. The malpractice of falsified authorship is difficult to identify and today this unethical practice has taken much more dangerous turn and doctors without any feeling of guilt are getting authorship of studies even in internationally peer reviewed journals as gift of gratification for certain unfair favour in studies, examinations or granting special facilities at the college & hospitals.

Is this the attitude of Medical Professionals to the pledge taken under Hypocratic oath, the declaration of Geneva or the International code of Medical Ethics? Such an apathy for moral value by Doctors is a matter that should be pondered by statutory bodies like Medical Council or Dental Council of India who should without delay take remedial measures to intercept and irradicate malignant growth of unethical practices bringing back the high profile image of Medical Profession.

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