

## Writing for Hire: Advice for Authors (and Readers)

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Based on a recent set of events, it has become clear that the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)* needs to provide more guidance to authors to ensure that *CJON* articles are unbiased (Jutel & Menkes, 2008) as well as to help develop the publication skills of oncology nurses. Joyce P. Griffin-Sobel, RN, PhD, AOCN®, APRN-BC, previous *CJON* editor, wrote,

The purpose [of editorial independence] is to ensure that journal content is free of bias from political or commercial interest. Editors have a basic duty to establish procedures to protect a journal from outside interests or conflicts of interest, thereby giving readers some assurance that the articles they read are not biased (Griffin-Sobel, 2006, p. 555).

*CJON* previously had an editorial policy banning articles written by medical writers as a way to avoid *ghostwriting*, where one person writes an article but another is the author of record. Although this is one approach to ensure editorial integrity, another is to publish articles with editorial and financial support and sponsorship clearly described, thereby helping to bring timely and important content to readers. The editorial board believed this was necessary to fulfilling one of the journal's missions to provide practical information necessary to care for patients and their families across the cancer continuum. Since mid-2007, *CJON* has published 12 such articles.

The decision to write for a company that assists writers is very complex. One issue is compensation. Authors are regularly compensated to varying degrees for book chapters, but in most cases, they

are not compensated for journal articles. Compensation typically is not controversial. The real issue centers on who writes the article, how it is written, and why it is written.

### Key Considerations

#### How and Why

Many published ethical guidelines provide direction to authors, medical writers, and sponsors (Graf et al., 2007), yet based on our experience, authors need to consider several key points prior to making a decision to engage in such an activity. The first is how and why a potential author is approached to write the paper. If a professional writer or company states the author was recommended by a reputable organization such as the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), the author should ask who specifically made the referral and confirm it. Authors should be cautious of a company that solicits them with general information, making them believe a request is more credible than it might actually be.

#### Ownership

The amount of ownership an author has regarding the content is the major consideration. If a writing company suggests an outline and general topic area, the

author maintains ownership because he or she can direct the flow of the paper and determine what will be included. In this case, there should be no apparent conflict or controversy. Oftentimes, a company might be engaged to organize a group of papers for a supplement and suggests an outline for a paper. No conflict exists if the company's role is to ensure that there is no overlap of content or to provide editorial consistency among the papers. Similarly, this occurs when a book editor determines what will occur in a certain chapter, but the author determines the flow and direction of the content. A major problem can arise, however, if the company submits a reasonably polished draft of a paper to the author for review, minor editing, or simply approval. This type of paper usually is written by a professional medical writer, and the author's name, reputation, and expertise are sought to promote an interest in the sponsor or lend credibility to the paper. This is not an issue if the author actually writes the paper, even if the writing company makes some suggestions and the author agrees that the changes enhance the paper.

#### Editing

Another consideration is the amount and type of editing that occurs. All papers

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should have some level of editing prior to publication; good editing almost always leads to a better paper. If a writing company edits an author's work, the author should review and approve changes prior to submission. This is an area that can be problematic if the supplement or paper is financially supported by a company with an interest in the topic; authors need to be aware of competing interests during this phase of development and ensure that fair balance and evidence-based claims are included.

Other editorial assistance can be very helpful to busy clinical authors. A writing company can help authors obtain articles for review to assist with writing the paper. This is not a potential problem if the author requests specific articles. The author needs to be familiar with the available literature to ensure that key references are not excluded. If the writing company has a technical editor, that person can help format references correctly, which enhances the paper. Similarly, the company may have the resources to produce or obtain permission to use a figure or graphic, as such use often incurs a fee. However, the author must retain control and have a detailed paper trail of the permissions for reproduction, correct information for citation of the source, and proper format of the figure. This allows the author to control the inclusion of an appropriate figure and prevents complications during the publication process.

### Submission

Many journals now require that authors upload their manuscripts electronically. If an author uploads a file, he or she can be assured that the correct version is submitted. If the company

uploads it, the author should request a copy of the uploaded version to ensure version control. In addition, the primary or corresponding author, not the writing group, needs to respond to all editing and author queries as well as be responsible for reviewing the final proofs. The corresponding author signs an understanding agreement assuming full responsibility for the integrity of the work as a whole, from inception to published article. If the author really wrote the paper, it is not an issue for the author to sign and take ownership of the paper. When someone else writes an article, the published paper must acknowledge that a writing company was involved, the funding source of the support, and the extent to which the author claims ownership of the paper. This transparency is essential to maintain editorial integrity.

### Conclusion

Nurses have great clinical expertise, and sharing this information through the publication process is vital to the profession and to improving cancer care. Competing demands and time constraints, especially for busy clinical nurses, are challenges to those interested in sharing their clinical expertise with their peers. Potential authors need to consider how they can best get articles into print and resources they can access to achieve this goal.

Novice authors might find it helpful to pair with a mentor at work, through a local ONS chapter, or through a formal mentorship program such as the one offered through *CJON*. That way they can find the support and expertise to move an idea forward to a published paper. To those who choose to or who are offered a publishing opportunity through

a sponsored professional writer: Be sure to ask questions, retain control of the authorship and editorial processes, and honestly disclose the assistance and role of a professional writer and any financial support received to maintain the integrity of the publication process. As the article is reviewed and edited, areas of potential bias will be addressed to ensure the information is well supported and that fair balance exists. When the author maintains control of the content included in the manuscript, writing a paper can be a professionally and personally rewarding experience and accomplishment. The author sacrifices these rewards when the paper is largely written by a writing company.

When all participants in the publishing process follow established guidelines for editorial integrity, the journal remains a credible source for its readers. *CJON* is one of the most highly valued benefits of ONS membership. Readers can trust that authors, reviewers, and editorial staff work diligently to maintain the high quality of our offerings.

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