

Can Deceased People be Added as Authors on Academic Publications?

Ölen Kişiler Akademik Yayınlar Yazar Olarak Eklenebilir mi?

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Introduction

In this issue of our journal, we published the article by Altun et al. (1) titled “Analysis of the knowledge level of the surgical residents regarding the preoperative assessment of the adult elective non-cardiac surgery patients with specific clinical condition”. Nagihan Karahan, one of the authors of this article, passed away in 2023 (1). Based on this example, we wanted to inform our readers about the authorship of the publications of deceased persons.

This editorial underscores the importance of ethical considerations in posthumous authorship and provides a guideline for ensuring that contributions are recognized with the respect and transparency that they deserve. By adhering to these principles, the medical research teams can continue to honor the legacies of its contributors accurately and ethically (2).

Authorship in scientific and medical research extends beyond a mere acknowledgment of contribution; it serves as a testament to the intellectual and practical efforts of individuals involved in the study. The ethical and procedural

dimensions of attributing authorship are well-defined for living contributors, but a unique question arises when considering deceased individuals. Can a deceased person be listed as an author of scientific articles? The answer is affirmative, contingent upon adherence to certain ethical standards and guidelines (3). This article explores the ethical and procedural aspects of attributing authorship to a deceased individual in scientific publications. Sometimes participants in research collaborations die before the research report is accepted for publication. Such an unfortunate event can occur at any stage of the work process from early idea and design to late changes in the manuscript, and even after the manuscript has been submitted to a journal. This situation may raise questions in our minds for both the authors and the editorial boards of the journals.

Opinions on this subject have a wide range. While some insistently argue that a deceased individual can never be listed as an author, others believe that such individuals should be thanked, and yet another group states that



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posthumous authorship is permissible given that the individual meets the established criteria for authorship (4).

Yes, a deceased person can be listed as an author of scientific articles under certain circumstances (2). This typically occurs when the individual made significant contributions to the research before their death. Assigning authorship to a deceased researcher involves careful consideration of ethical guidelines and respect for the individual's contributions. The key points are (3):

1. Significant contribution: The deceased person must have made a substantial intellectual contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the research.

2. Manuscript drafting or revising: They should have been involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content.

3. Approval of final version: If they contributed significantly but died before the final version was completed, it is generally acceptable to include them as an author, provided that the remaining authors believe they would have approved the final manuscript.

4. Ethical and transparent acknowledgment: The situation should be transparently communicated to the journal and readers. Often, a note is included in the manuscript acknowledging the contribution and noting the person's passing.

5. Institutional policies: Policies can vary by journal and institution, but most follow guidelines from bodies such as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, which emphasize the importance of substantial contributions and approval of the final version.

Precedents and Practical Examples

There are numerous precedents in medical research where deceased individuals have been rightfully credited as authors posthumously. These instances often occur in long-term studies where the deceased had laid significant groundwork. For example, in multi-year oncology studies or epidemiological research, the contributions of a deceased researcher can be substantial and ongoing until their death (5). The eleven journals under the umbrella of the American Meteorological Society adopt the view of designating a deceased person who meets the authorship requirements as a co-author (5). The corresponding author accepts responsibility for including as authors all individuals who meet these criteria for authorship. Since it is not considered appropriate for authors to thank each

other in the Acknowledgments section of journals within the American Physical Society, it is advocated not to thank a deceased author (5). However, they can express their continued respect and admiration for a deceased co-author with a dedication, or a death dagger (†) and a footnote are placed in the author's line of the title page. In the footnote, it is stated that the author passed away and the date of death is provided for reference (4). Similarly, in the British Medical Journal; deceased persons who are deemed suitable as authors are included with a dagger symbol (†) next to the author's name and a footnote stating that the author has passed away and giving the date of death (6). Dove Press requests that one of the authors be appointed as proxy in cases where a posthumous author is appointed but submission forms must be signed. This proxy author should be addressed to the writer, a family member, or the person holding the power of attorney. In all cases, an effort should be made to contact the family of the deceased author to inform them of the intent and obtain their consent for the listing (6). As a general guideline at Cochrane, where an author has made a significant contribution to a protocol or review (sufficient to guarantee authorship) but has died before publication and co-authors consider it appropriate to include the deceased author in the byline, editorial teams will carry out this action and ensure that the author is included in the byline (2). Deceased persons who are eligible as Authors in more than two thousand seven hundred journals of the Springer Nature publishing house are included with a footnote announcing their death (5).

If the deceased author was the contact person for the scientific article, a new contact person should be determined (2).

Posthumous authorship in medical research is both ethically permissible and appropriate when the individual's contributions meet the established criteria for authorship (2). Transparent communication and adherence to ethical guidelines are essential to ensure that the recognition of the deceased's work is handled with respect and integrity. As medical research continues to evolve, corresponding adjustments in policies and practices surrounding this sensitive tissue are anticipated to ensure that all contributions are fairly and accurately acknowledged.

In conclusion, acknowledging the contributions of deceased researchers upholds the integrity of the scientific process and honors the lasting impact of their work. It is a testament to the collaborative and enduring nature of scientific inquiry.

Ethics

Authorship Contributions

Surgical and Medical Practices: K.E., M.A., Concept: M.A., Design: M.A., Data Collection or Processing: M.A., Analysis or Interpretation: M.A., Literature Search: M.A., Writing: M.A.

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