

**Editorial****Is Academic Position for Sale?**

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While I was visiting a neighboring country in the Middle East and during my usual walk in the park, I felt few palpitations; therefore, I decided to call a physician-friend. Because I had two stents inserted five years ago, he suggested I undergo full cardiac check-up including: (ECG) Echocardiography, Trans-esophageal echocardiography (TEE), Treadmill testing, Tilt table Test, Thallium radio-nucleotide scanning of the Heart, MRI and possible cardiac catheterization.

A week later, while I was awaiting the results in the consultation room of my physician-friend a call came to him from the president of 'Mickey Mouse' University. After the usual exchange of greetings and a few laughs he said, "The President is offering me the title of professor" in the university, what do you think? Should I accept?" I said, "I thought the title of professor requires that the candidate to have been in the academic field for many years, teaches campus-based or online students, performs and publishes advanced research in his field of expertise, provides pro-bono community service, and trains new academics". Moreover, I added, "Usually a professor begins his careers as assistant professors, with subsequent promotions to the ranks of associate professor and finally attains a professor. There is usually a strict timeline for promotion from assistant to associate professor - usually 5 or 8 years. In addition, a number of external and internal reviewers are usually involved in assessing the candidate's credentials and suitability for promotion, I have never heard of a professor being appointed on a whim and without at least undergoing some form of evaluation and scrutiny".

He said, "You live in ideal or fantasy world, which does not exist. In our region, even, my son could inherit my position as a professor. Besides that, do you not see that some universities, even in the West, are distributing honorary PhDs and honorary professorships to any *Tom Dick or Harry*." I said, "This is true, but that is an honorary degree and position, usually given for great charity work, social or economic achievement". He said, "Remember that I work for the power of the establishment and pleasing me means pleasing the power they need".

He said, "Now medical schools are established for profit not for excellence in science and academic achievement. Many medical schools are private institutions which seek the help of the establishment and pharmaceutical industry in the country. Not only do they seek the help but also try to make the establishment happy whenever necessary. In view of the fact that there are an increasing number of medical schools in Bahrain, it is hardly surprising that medical institutions feel justified in accepting help from any source.

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Reflecting on that conversation with my colleague, I asked myself, “How many medical colleges do we need in Bahrain? Do we need a medical school in every village in Bahrain; that would be more than fifty medical colleges? Perhaps that is not such a bad idea; we could be the first country in the world where doctor/patient ratio could be one to one.

Five years ago, a professor, no less, in one of the medical colleges in this region wrote an editorial titled “How to Survive.....”. In the editorial, he advised aspiring young authors how to write an acceptable article to the editors. The things that strikes an editor are: the title is not written properly, numerous grammatical and syntax errors, the reference names quoted in the text and in the reference list are misspelled and the references were written wrongly, not in accordance with Vancouver or Harvard style. In addition, it seems he never read the proof of his editorial because under his name was written: Kingdom of.... (Blank); may be the Kingdom was unknown or does not exist.

The professor in question never had any qualification as an editor and never attended a course or a workshop in editing. Besides that, he had a meager number of publications which had not been properly edited or reviewed. A professor in any field does not make him an editor unless he is trained or qualified in editing.

It would have been prudent of the “professor” to have advised his students and other authors to read the following basic books for authors, rather than to pose as an expert not in his own field:

1. Hall GM. How to Write a Paper. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: BMJ Publication, 2008.
2. Swinscow TDV, Campbell MJ. Statistics at Square One. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. London: BMJ Publication, 2002.
3. Albert T. A - Z of Medical Writing. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: BMJ Publication, 2000.
4. Zeiger M. Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Professional, 1999.
5. Iles RL. Guidebook to Better Medical Writing. Revised ed. Olathe Kan: Iles Publications, 2003.
6. Katz M J. From Research to Manuscript: A Guide to Scientific Writing. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Springer, 2009.
7. Schwager E. Medical English Usage and Abuse. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Phoenix:: Oryx Express 1991.
8. Lang TA, Secic M. How to Report Statistics in Medicine. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2006.
9. Al Bareeq JM. Writing in Science. Basic Guide for Authors and Editors Whose Native Language is Not English. Bahrain: 2006.

The same professor, no other, claimed in an article to the lay newspaper that Apollo 11 space flight, which landed the first humans on Earth's Moon on July 20, 1969, was hoax and he claimed that Commander Neil Armstrong did all what he did in a movie studio. On many occasions, he was justifying myths by establishing a false link to medicine in a lay newspaper. If we have professor with that mental attitude, what would we expect from the students?

In a flash of light, I reflected on the article titled “Is Academic Medicine for Sale?” by Angell M, in which the author wrote:

“When the boundaries between power establishment and academic medicine become as blurred as they now are, the business goals of establishment influence the mission of the medical schools in multiple ways. The academic medical centers, in allowing themselves to be manipulated by the power establishment would lose their academic freedom”<sup>1</sup>.

The medical colleges are increasing; therefore, their dependence on the establishment and pharmaceutical industry is increasing, but academic medicine depends more than ever on the public's trust and goodwill; if the public begins to lose its trust then it would take more than a generation to regain it back<sup>1</sup>.

It is not only medical schools in question but also research in academics. One of the most outstanding examples of corruption in research and academics is the ‘gift authorship’. I have many examples of gift authorship which I will not enumerate but I will cite only two flagrant examples of abuse by academicians for the sake of promotion.

The first article is from an associate professor titled “Sensorineural Deafness”. That article was badly written, the introduction is mixed with the method and the result is mixed with the discussion. The statistics quoted were wrong, all the percentages were wrong and the numbers were different in the text compared to the tables and figures. After the article had been edited and reviewed by our reviewers, the consensus was to reject the article because it cannot be modified. After the author received the reviewers’ comments, he called me and said that his promotion to a professor depends on that article and he would like me to help him. I said that I would be ready to help if he sends the raw data and from there I can organize the material and rewrite the article properly. He told me that he does not have the raw data; it is in Egypt with an Egyptian who helped with the article. I was wondering why he is not able to contact him and why the Egyptian was not a coauthor.

The second one was a neurology article from another associate professor. The article quoted percentages without numbers in the result. We wrote to the author and explained to him that percentages in the result without numbers are not acceptable and we asked him to supply the numbers in order to check statistically and verify the percentages. As soon as he received our message he called me and said he does not have the numbers and I asked “why not”, he said that the “guy” who helped him with article has resigned from the university and left the country.

It is seldom that scientist, reviewers and editors are alerted to the fabrication and falsification of data, but it is very easy to find when the sole author does not know where was his raw data<sup>2,3</sup>. Scientific fraud involves falsification<sup>2,3</sup> and recently buying the data from another author who most probably fabricated the data and wishes his name not to appear on it; he is by definition is a ghost author<sup>4</sup>. It seems that ghost authorship is increasing in the industry but in the Middle East in academics.

Ghost authorship and ghost writing have several definitions, but I will quote the most common.

“Ghostwriting is where a professional medical writer prepares a manuscript on behalf of a named author, but the writer is not listed as an author”<sup>5</sup>.

“Ghost authorship occurs when an individual who contributed substantially to a manuscript is not named in the byline or acknowledgments. Ghost authorship also compromises academic integrity”<sup>6</sup>.

It is difficult to have a dialog with a ghost, especially if the named author had not been involved in the underlying experimental study and unable to explain or defend the material to the editors or reviewers<sup>7</sup>.

Plagiarism will not be covered in this editorial, simply because it was covered in depth in an editorial by Dr Al-Muharraqi M and Dr Zbys Fedorowicz<sup>8,9</sup>. I would like simply to refer to an article submitted by an assistant professor in which several of the paragraphs were copy verbatim. I called her and I said that those paragraphs need to be modified because of medical usage and abusage (diplomatic language for “plagiarism”). I did not expect her answer when she said that these paragraphs were exact copies from 4-6 references. Clearly, she was unaware that she was accusing herself of “Plagiarism”.

**Bahrain Medical Bulletin is the first medical journal in the Middle East to require authors of original research articles to sign a conflict of interest declaration. It is important and reasonable to disclose any ties, financial or otherwise to the readers. These ties have become common.**

**I would really hope that our academic institutions emphasize and look for ‘Ghost authorship’ and to make it a condition that each author of an experimental study signs the form of “Conflict of Interest”.**

**It is recommended that teaching research methods and writing to undergraduates is to be made mandatory and part of the curriculum of medical school.**

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3. White C. Suspected Research Fraud: Difficulties of Getting at the Truth. BMJ 2005; 331: 281-8.

4. Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, et al. Ghost Authorship in Industry-Initiated Randomised Trials. *PLoS Med* 2007; 4(1): e19.
5. Jacobs A, Carpenter J, Donnelly J, et al. The Involvement of Professional Medical Writers in Medical Publications: Results of a Delphi Study. *Curr Med Res Opin* 2005; 21(2): 311-6.
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7. Cho M, McKee M. Authorship in Biomedical Research: Realities and Expectations. *Science* 2002. [http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_development/previous\\_issuess/articles/1470/authorship\\_in\\_biomedical\\_research\\_realities\\_and\\_expectations/](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issuess/articles/1470/authorship_in_biomedical_research_realities_and_expectations/). Accessed on 03.08.2010.
8. Al-Muharraqi MA, Fedorowicz Z. Plagiarism - Part I: Is It Academic Dishonesty and Misconduct? *Bahrain Med Bull*. 2008; 30(4): 137-9.
9. Al-Muharraqi MA, Fedorowicz Z. Plagiarism - Part II: Finding and Dealing with a Fraudster. *Bahrain Med Bull* 2009; 31(1): 5-7.