
Where does the author belong?

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Research funding is partly based on the number of scientific publications. This makes it important which institutions the authors state as their workplace.

Publication activity has an impact on research budgets. The author's address has therefore become a topic that evokes questions of an ethical nature. An author can list more than one institutional address on a scientific publication. The publication points are then distributed among the institutions involved. Not unexpectedly, the reward system has spurred many institutions to prepare their own instructions for authors' addresses. While the Western Norway Regional Health Authority has referred to the Vancouver rules for authorship and interpreted these as applying to institutions as well, Oslo University Hospital and the University of Oslo have agreed that authors employed by both institutions should always list both addresses.

PhD students have been affected by pre-defined agreements. For example, the University of Oslo has changed its guidelines from not requiring that externally salaried PhD students use the university as their address on publications [\(1\)](#) to saying that they *must* do so, in addition to entering the address of their main employer [\(2\)](#). This means that PhD students who are enrolled in a PhD programme at the University of Oslo, but salaried by and supervised at health enterprises, university colleges or research institutes, nevertheless should credit the university. Worries about current practices spurred the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions to take an initiative for preparing a set of shared guidelines. In April 2011, the board of the association adopted advisory guidelines for crediting of scientific institutions. The National

Cooperation Group for Medical and Health Research (NSG) and the Association of Research Institutes (FFA) joined the initiative (3, 4). Consequently, a shared set of guidelines was established for the institutions that account for the major proportion of health-research cooperation in Norway. What do these guidelines say? The main rule consists of three items: «1) An institution shall be stated as an address in a publication if it has provided a necessary and material contribution to, or the basis for, the participation of an author in the published work; 2) The same author shall also state other institutions as addresses if in each individual case these also comply with the requirement in item 1; 3) An employment relationship or a supervisory responsibility can be considered as a basis for crediting of an institution, *if the requirement in item 1 has been complied with.*»

How have these guidelines been followed up? Following a discussion in the organs for regional cooperation, a fourth item was proposed by a working group appointed by the cooperation committee for South-Eastern Norway Regional Health Authority and the University of Oslo (5): «As a main rule, a university or university college employee in a combined position in a health enterprise/hospital should state the address of his/her own academic institution (university or university college) and the health enterprise. This applies irrespective of the full-time equivalent at the university/university college and the source of funding of the position.»

Here the employment relationship, and *not* the scientific contribution, is the central issue. The working group justified the additional item by stating that it would be unfortunate if institutions earned credits by persons in combined positions solely on the basis of the authors' discretion. Furthermore, the group claimed that it is difficult to imagine cases where only one of the institutions can be said to have contributed in accordance with item 1, and that this is a main rule/norm for crediting (6). The general guidelines issued by the University of Oslo, on the other hand, state that in addition to the university address, employees can state the address of their second employer when the publication is based on research undertaken in the framework of this second position, and that employees in purely secondary teaching positions should not use the University of Oslo as their address (7). In this case, the contribution, and *not* the employment relationship is the essential issue.

In November 2011, the National Cooperation Group for Medical and Health Research reviewed the guidelines (8). The additional item was not endorsed by all the members. That brings us back to square one – varying practices. Western Norway Regional Health Authority has updated its website with the new shared guidelines from 2011, and specifies that crediting is decided by the individual researcher (9). The University of Oslo has retained its former guidelines (2, 7).

Publication ethics is largely based on the authors' discretion. It is worrisome if this discretion should be seen as untrustworthy. The contributions must be assessed for each individual publication, and not obligated by an agreement signed before the research project is initiated. Pre-defined agreements based on employment relationships are undesirable. Employing productive researchers in secondary positions could thus become an important strategic mechanism

for institutions seeking to increase their earning of publication points, without necessarily undertaking much research themselves. Some journals specify that the author's address should reflect the place where the actual work has been undertaken. The key principle of the new guidelines is exactly this precondition regarding the author's contribution to the publication. The publication policy of the institutions should be guided by the same principles of ethics that the researchers are expected to comply with.

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