



27 April 2017

Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Publication types and authorship modes in trials

Assuming a group is committed to the publication imperative in trials, it is prudent for them to establish policy on publication and authorship before there are papers to write.

A paper here is a full length publication appearing in a peer-reviewed, indexed, medical journals, exclusive of abstracts.

The tendency in any discussion of paper writing is to focus on publications of results, but groups may produce different types of publications and hence should establish different authorship policies depending on publication type.

Publication types are as listed below.

Primary

- Publications of the primary results (publication reporting on results for a primary outcome measure)
- Publications detailing design and methods of the trial
- Publications detailing entry characteristics of the study population
- Publications detailing results leading to early stops
- Publications detailing basis for change in enrollment criteria or treatment protocol

Secondary

- Publications of results for secondary outcome measures
- “Natural history” publications (e.g., results over time for the placebo-assigned group)

Tertiary

- Publications detailing reading or coding procedures for measures in the trial
- Publications of specialized analysis procedures used in the trial
- Interim progress reports related to recruitment and enrollment

Ancillary

- Publications from ancillary studies done by one or more members of the investigator group
- Publications of substudies of the primary investigation

Authorship forms, as represented in mastheads of publications are:

Conventional

Only persons named in the masthead (e.g., *Pernelda V Applebee, Richard L Harris, Roger W McFarland, and Franklin B Casper*)

Modified conventional

Conventional form plus attribution to corporate name of the study group in the masthead (e.g., *Pernelda V Applebee, Richard L Harris, Roger W McFarland, and Franklin B Casper and the POS Trial Research Group* or *for the POS Trial Research Group*)

Corporate

Only the corporate name of the group in the masthead (e.g., *The POS Research Group*; no writing committee listed)

Modified corporate

Corporate form plus designation of the writing committee in a footnote to the masthead page or as listed in the credits section of the manuscript (e.g., *The POS Research Group* in the masthead; footnote to the masthead or in credits section of the paper: Writing committee: *Pernelda V Applebee, Richard L Harris, Roger W McFarland, and Franklin B Casper*)

The conventional form of attribution is best suited for studies involving small numbers of investigators. It is not well-suited to studies involving dozens of investigators. The difficulty in those settings is the tendency to use masthead author listings more as a credits list than as an author listing.

The corporate mode of attribution is the mode of choice for multicenter trials with dozens of investigators. The advantage is that it eliminates the “jockeying” for position in masthead listings when authors are named. It also has the advantage of forcing people, in references to the trial, to use the corporate name rather the name of an author, e.g., the “POS research group” as opposed to the work of “Applebee and coworkers”.

The downside is that it is not a favorite of journal editors, especially the form where there is no writing committee listed and, hence, no named persons to attest to the veracity of the paper.

The downside for investigators is absence of recognition in the published paper. The issue of recognition is especially important to people in academic institutions where promotions depend, in large measure, on authorship. Promotion committees may have difficulty evaluating the merits of candidates with CVs filled with papers with corporate authorship attributions.

The advantage for people looking for publications from a group using any of the three formats involving use of a corporate name lies in the ability to find publications from the group with that name. The National Library of Medicine introduced corporate name [CN] as a searchable tag in 2000.

Recommendations

1. Establish publication and authorship policy before there are papers to write
2. Establish a commissioning authority for primary and secondary publications and for designating authors for those papers
3. Choose an appropriate corporate name for the research group
4. For investigator groups of 12 or more use the corporate form of authorship for primary publications
5. Include the corporate name of the trial in mastheads of secondary and tertiary publications
6. Use the unmodified conventional form of authorship for ancillary publications
7. Agree on how the corporate name of the group is to appear in masthead listings and make certain it appears exactly that way in all publications having corporate name in masthead listings