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TIPS FOR THESIS WRITING AND PREPARING RESEARCH PAPERS

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Ethics of ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primary medical research is essentially a team effort but all members of the team may not qualify to be authors. They are thanked in the acknowledgment section for their contribution. People providing purely laboratory assistance, statistical assistance, data collection assistance, patient care assistance, etc., outside their routine duty come in this category. Help of scientific advisers, persons who critically reviewed the manuscript, and departmental heads who provided general support should also be acknowledged. If you have received dataset from somebody, acknowledge properly. All financial or material support must be acknowledged. There is no need to be overenthusiastic about acknowledging help, or acknowledging to serve vested interest. Example 1 illustrates what can go wrong even with this benign aspect of the paper.

Example 1: Embarrassing acknowledgment

Chatfield (2002) describes receiving a copy of an off print acknowledging his statistical advice provided three years earlier on a trial that could not find significant difference between low-level laser therapy for rheumatoid arthritis of finger joints and the placebo. He had not seen the paper in either draft or final

form. The paper had some inappropriate graphs. Perhaps the refereeing process also bypassed statistical content because the name of a (reputed) statistician appeared in the acknowledgments!

Instances of the type described in Example 1 are not uncommon. We have found ourselves in spot many times because of 'generosity' of authors in acknowledging our help without our knowledge. They misquoted our interpretation, even mentioned an out of context statistical procedure that was used for some other analysis. We now take an undertaking from our clients that they will not acknowledge our help without our approval. Many journals require that written permission be obtained from those acknowledged. Vancouver Group also endorses this requirement. If the acknowledged persons want to see the manuscript, show it to them so that they can check what you have written is right.

REFERENCE

Chatfield C (2002). Confession of a pragmatic statistician. *The Statistician* 51 (Part 1): 1-20.

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