

# Writing for Hire: Advice for Authors (and Readers)

Deborah K. Mayer, PhD, RN, AOCN®, FAAN, Suzanne M. Mahon, RN, DNSc, AOCN®, APNG,  
and Beth Eaby, MSN, CRNP, OCN®

Based on a recent set of events, it has become clear that the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* (CJON) needs to provide more guidance to authors to ensure that CJON articles are unbiased (Jutel & Menkes, 2008) as well as to help develop the publication skills of oncology nurses. Joyce P. Griffin-Sobel, RN, PhD, AOCN®, APRN-BC, previous CJON editor, wrote,

The purpose [of editorial independence] is to ensure that journal content is free of bias from political or commercial interest. Editors have a basic duty to establish procedures to protect a journal from outside interests or conflicts of interest, thereby giving readers some assurance that the articles they read are not biased (Griffin-Sobel, 2006, p. 555).

CJON previously had an editorial policy banning articles written by medical writers as a way to avoid *ghostwriting*, where one person writes an article but another is the author of record. Although this is one approach to ensure editorial integrity, another is to publish articles with editorial and financial support and sponsorship clearly described, thereby helping to bring timely and important content to readers. The editorial board believed this was necessary to fulfilling one of the journal's missions to provide practical information necessary to care for patients and their families across the cancer continuum. Since mid-2007, CJON has published 12 such articles.

The decision to write for a company that assists writers is very complex. One issue is compensation. Authors are regularly compensated to varying degrees for book chapters, but in most cases, they

are not compensated for journal articles. Compensation typically is not controversial. The real issue centers on who writes the article, how it is written, and why it is written.

## Key Considerations

### How and Why

Many published ethical guidelines provide direction to authors, medical writers, and sponsors (Graf et al., 2007), yet based on our experience, authors need to consider several key points prior to making a decision to engage in such an activity. The first is how and why a potential author is approached to write the paper. If a professional writer or company states the author was recommended by a reputable organization such as the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), the author should ask who specifically made the referral and confirm it. Authors should be cautious of a company that solicits them with general information, making them believe a request is more credible than it might actually be.

### Ownership

The amount of ownership an author has regarding the content is the major consideration. If a writing company suggests an outline and general topic area, the

author maintains ownership because he or she can direct the flow of the paper and determine what will be included. In this case, there should be no apparent conflict or controversy. Oftentimes, a company might be engaged to organize a group of papers for a supplement and suggests an outline for a paper. No conflict exists if the company's role is to ensure that there is no overlap of content or to provide editorial consistency among the papers. Similarly, this occurs when a book editor determines what will occur in a certain chapter, but the author determines the flow and direction of the content. A major problem can arise, however, if the company submits a reasonably polished draft of a paper to the author for review, minor editing, or simply approval. This type of paper usually is written by a professional medical writer, and the author's name, reputation, and expertise are sought to promote an interest in the sponsor or lend credibility to the paper. This is not an issue if the author actually writes the paper, even if the writing company makes some suggestions and the author agrees that the changes enhance the paper.

### Editing

Another consideration is the amount and type of editing that occurs. All papers

---

Deborah K. Mayer, PhD, RN, AOCN®, is the editor of the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* and an associate professor in the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill; Suzanne M. Mahon, RN, DNSc, AOCN®, APNG, is a clinical professor in the Department of Internal Medicine and the School of Nursing at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, MO; and Beth Eaby, MSN, CRNP, OCN®, is a nurse practitioner in Abramson Cancer Center at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/09.CJON.131-132