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| **13th Punjab Bioethics Group Meeting**  Shalamar Medical & Dental College, Lahore  Friday, December 9th 2022 |

# **Call to order**

The 13th meeting of **Punjab Bioethics Group** was held virtually at **Shalamar Medical & Dental College, Lahore** on Friday, February 17th 2022. The meeting was moderated by Dr. Sarosh Saleem and lasted two hours; & was attended by the following professionals from various institutes of Pakistan.

**Attendees included:**

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| Dr. Sarosh Saleem Dr. Ainul Momina |
| Dr. Aamenah Malik Dr. Saira |
| Dr. Afifa Ehsan, Dr. Ambreen Khalid, |
| Dr. Ali Raza Dr. Mumtaz Lakhani |
| Dr. Annum Ishtiaq Dr. Fareeha Farooq |
| Dr. Nasim Tariq Dr. Nazish Khalid |
| Dr. Nousheen Dr. Sharmeen |
| Dr. Raja Sajjad Asghar Dr. Faiza Ahmad |
| Dr. Shakeel Ahmed Dr. Fatima Sikander |
| Dr. Shaziz Rasul Dr. Zainab Umar |

**Regrets:**

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| Dr. Saadia Shahzad Dr. Aisha Malik |

# **call to order**

Two cases were discussed. The participants engaged in the discussion with enthusiasm.

# **old business**

**Dr. Sharmeen: Indus hospital Manawan-Follow up on incest/abortion case**

According to Dr. Sharmeen's report, Dr. Sarosh has created a WhatsApp group consisting of a few volunteers, including Ms. Anum Advocate, who has generously offered her pro bono services to assist with a particular case involving abortion. Ms. Anum Advocate has explained that the case may require some time and effort, but the group will make every effort to handle it effectively. Ms. Anum Advocate is expected to provide guidelines on how to proceed with the case. Dr. Sharmeen has encouraged more volunteers to join the group, and all efforts will be appreciated. Dr. Sarosh has expressed appreciation for the follow-up and requested that all relevant information regarding the case be shared within the group.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Dr. Annum Ishtiaq: “Authorship Issues – Can my students write paper for me?” “Authorship -Need vs. Want”**

Dr. Annum shared a thought-provoking social media post regarding the issue of stealing credit for someone else's work and passing it off as one's own. According to the post, Research Ethics Committees should be concerned about the rights of human researchers. Dr. Annum spoke about the devaluation of writers and researchers and emphasized the importance of authorship as a means of obtaining concrete rewards such as employment, promotions, financial support, and recognition for scientific achievements. She pointed out that authorship affects both the individual's success and the institution to which they are affiliated. Dr. Annum raised important questions about what level of authorship each contributor deserves, including medical students who assist with data collection and statisticians who perform data analysis and interpretation.

During her residency, Dr. Annum heard from faculty members that the people working in research departments are simply doing their jobs. However, she argued that creating something significant or analyzing data takes a considerable amount of effort, and those individuals contribute to the protocol as well as the manuscript.

Dr. Annum referenced the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) guidelines, which state that anyone who has played a significant role in the study concept/design, data collection, data analysis/interpretation, writing or revising of the manuscript, or ensuring the research's accuracy and authenticity can be considered an author. She raised questions about whether authorship should be determined based on contributions rather than positions and how the IRB members can be more vigilant in this regard.

Moreover, Dr. Annum questioned the reasons for not giving appropriate authorship to people working in research departments and medical students and how to overcome the culture of "guest authorship." Finally, she asked who should ultimately decide the authorship of a research paper.

In conclusion, Dr. Annum's social media post highlighted the importance of authorship and the need for clarity on the level of authorship each contributor deserves. Her questions serve as an invitation for researchers and institutions to consider these issues carefully and ensure that authors' rights are protected.

During a discussion on authorship criteria, Dr. Fareeha shared a practice where researchers fill out a form from the beginning of the project, indicating which tasks each member will be responsible for. She emphasized the importance of deciding authorship criteria beforehand, dividing tasks based on expertise, and positioning the first author according to significant contributions or time put into the research. This ensures fairness and satisfaction among all members, as acknowledgment promotes motivation.

Dr. Sarosh supported this practice, highlighting the distinction between proposals and papers and the different kinds of contributions required for each. Dr. Annum agreed, noting the pressure of peer review and the potential for changes in the research team over time, and questioned how Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) can aid in establishing fair authorship.

Dr. Ainul acknowledged that while many journals require detailed information on each author's contributions, power dynamics and influence can still affect authorship in the public sector. She highlighted the ethical implications of giving authorship to individuals who have made no contributions to the research, and asked for suggestions on how to address this issue.

Dr. Afifa Ehsan suggested that researchers must learn to say "No" to unnecessary authorship claims, and that supervisors should also contribute to the research. Dr. Sarosh proposed a discussion on the role and resources of IRBs in formulating authorship criteria.

Dr. Fareeha emphasized the need to address power dynamics in faculty development programs and to educate students on fair authorship practices. The group agreed that including individuals as authors without proper contributions is unfair and unethical.

Dr. Mumtaz shared an experience from her time studying in the USA, where she faced a situation where she contributed significantly to a project, but her supervisor did not credit her in the paper. After confronting her supervisor, her name was added. She expressed her concern that in Pakistan, professors and faculty members are often viewed as authorities, making it challenging for students to stand up against such unfair practices. Dr. Mumtaz suggested that students should express their concerns in faculty feedback/evaluation and that the IRB should consider the contribution and credits of each author.

Dr. Sarosh agreed that in private institutions, feedback mechanisms exist, but rather than individuals taking the initiative, a culture should be established where everyone speaks out against the system and contributes. Dr. Sarosh also mentioned the significance of the IRB's role.

Dr. Raja suggested that the promotion mechanism for HODs should be changed to negate the impact of power dynamics. By considering different feedback channels, moral courage could be boosted.

Dr. Afifa agreed that promotion was the main factor behind this issue and supported the suggestion to eliminate this factor. She also questioned the criteria for analysts or statisticians and suggested that they should be considered authors.

Dr. Ainul shared that in her department, the statistician who analyzes research data hardly sees her name as an author. It is also customary that if an in-house statistician is involved, it is considered her job, and she is getting paid for it.

Dr. Sarosh suggested that author guidelines should be studied carefully. She shared an experience where students agreed to work on a manuscript at the time of proposal, but their contribution was not significant enough. However, they were still given authorship as committed at the time of the proposal.

Dr. Ainul agreed that some people who have minor contributions or only facilitate resource access expect or demand authorship, falling under the umbrella of power dynamics where colleagues or friends ask for authorship even if they only helped out with something minor.

Dr. Sarosh explained that clear boundaries should be established at the outset, and it should be mentioned that the plan will be reviewed once the writing is complete and the analysis is done. Only then can we determine how much each person contributed to the project. She shared her view that authorship should only be given to those who have made significant contributions to paper writing, including the results and discussion parts. Therefore, not all members of the research department should be given authorship

During a discussion on authorship criteria, Dr. Ali Raza emphasized that all authors must be accountable for all the questions related to a manuscript. He supported the idea that the statistician or data collector should not be given authorship, but should be acknowledged and given an incentive or promotion. Dr. Raza highlighted that authorship is a responsibility, not a luxury, and that the position of the author in a paper is not of significant importance outside of Pakistan.

Dr. Fatima expressed concern that saying "No" to a senior or HOD could have negative consequences, and asked how to handle this situation. In Qatar, if two people from the same institution are working together, only one of them would be given authorship.

Dr. Sarosh stated that both of these extreme practices should be discouraged and that clear guidelines should be established and followed by everyone. He suggested that IRBs should ask for details of contributions, and that there should be separate criteria for Pakistan.

Dr. Mumtaz suggested that IRB members should take ongoing ethics courses and meet certain criteria to become committee members, and should be rewarded for their contributions. Dr. Sarosh agreed and added that IRB members should have valid CT training certificates and a clear understanding of aims and objectives, but noted that the IRB does not have authority over manuscript rejection or objection.

Dr. Adeela explained that journals review the author's contributions and that it is the corresponding author's responsibility to submit a signed document where all authors state their contributions.

Dr. Ambreen proposed giving authorship to those who did the data analysis and wrote down the results, while Dr. Adeela emphasized the importance of actually writing something to be considered an author.

Dr. Sarosh concluded by stating that everyone should make themselves accountable and learn to say "No" to those who did not participate, and that it is important to start with ourselves.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

**Suggestions:**

Participants were encouraged to bring ethical issues to the discussion table without any hesitation.

**Announcement:**

Bioethics Department, SMDC is offering a one-year Post-graduate Diploma in Healthcare Ethics & Professionalism. Flyer for the induction of the third batch is out. The course is approved by University of Health Sciences (UHS). Application Deadline is 15th Feb 2023. For details, please visit: <https://smdc.edu.pk/admissions-dhep/>

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned by the moderator Dr. Sarosh Saleem with thanks to all attendees for their support and encouragement. The date and timing of the next meeting will be held on 7th April 2023 at 9:30 am (online).

**Minutes recorded by:**

***Sadia Rehman Rao***