

Drugs in the News 9-23-09 – Galloping Ghosts (Writing) and Medical Journal Retractions

A strongly worded editorial appearing in the open access journal Public Library of Science – Medicine (*PLoS Med*) suggested the retraction of medical journal articles written by unacknowledged authors. The *PLoS* editorial is attached and available on the Center for Drug Information and Research (CDIR) Web site at <http://cdir.lecom.edu>.

In Drugs in the News posted August 5, 2009 (http://cdir.lecom.us/dins_08-05-2009.html) ghostwriting was defined as a pharmaceutical industry practice of contracting with medical communications companies to write medical journal articles and solicit and pay physicians or pharmacists to be authors. The extent of ghostwriting in the medical literature is unknown.

The *PLoS* editorialists ask the poignant question and give an uncomfortable answer for users of the medical literature:

Q: “What ... can I truly trust as being unbiased?”

A: “... sadly, for some or even many journal articles, we just don't know.”

The *PLoS Med* editors argue and in our view correctly “... any papers where this breach [ghostwriting] is substantiated should be immediately retracted and those authors found to have not declared such interest should be banned from any subsequent publication in the journal and their misconduct reported to their institutions.”

Readers interested in exploring ghostwriting in greater detail are referred to the *PLoS Med*'s Wyeth Ghostwriting Archive at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/static/ghostwriting.action>.

Article Retractions

We asked the reference librarians at the Learning Resource Center if there is a method to identify retracted medical journal articles in PubMed. In fact, there is. Retracted publications are an article type the same way a review or a clinical trial is an article type. There is a LIMIT box that can be checked for retracted articles or the word “retraction” can be added to a search. Additional information on the National Library of Medicine's policy on journal article retractions can be found on their Web site at www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/errata.html.

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