

EDITORIAL

IS IT ESSENTIAL TO WRITE COMPLETE FIRST NAMES OF AUTHORS IN BIO-MEDICAL JOURNALS?

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A person is usually or rather always traced by his or her ancestral identity. Looking up at the word "identity" in Webster's dictionary revealed, "sameness of essential or general character in different instances, sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing, oneness; the distinguishing character of a personality of an individual, individuality..." (1).

Thus besides the other criteria that form the basis of identity, the "name" in itself constitutes an indispensable pillar in defining or else specifying an individual's identity. Name is the word by which an individual person is spoken of and essentially or perhaps customarily comprises of at least two parts i.e., the "first name" and the "family name". In the Western or Christian world, the former two are referred to as the Christian name and the surname respectively. Many a times, there is an additional "middle name" as well, besides the two forgoing essential components.

Of the three components, family name is the one, which imparts the person his social identity among individuals. Family name traces you back to your forefathers, ancestry and as such you are singled out. Naturally you feel proud of your this ancestral bondage and happily carry the family name and transfer it to your progeny. You feel a sense of dependence and a feeling of being part of that family, tribe or clan etc.

First name, on the other hand is traditionally chosen by the parents or guardians to distinguish you from the rest of the family members. Some people have a middle name that helps identification that is more accurate and serves the purpose.

In Persian past and contemporary history, as noticed in other histories, some family names are exceedingly common such as Musavi, Mohammadi, Tabatabai and so on. In the esteemed journal of *Acta Medica Iranica*, the first name of the author(s) is (are) abbreviated. This does increase the difficulty in identifying the true authors if incidentally, the family names appear to be the same and the first names also start with the same alphabetic letter.

To mention a person as an author of an article, it seems prudent and perhaps logical to write down the complete first name of the concerned author to circumvent the remote possibility of first names starting

with the same alphabet causing problems in search and identification. In the same context, first names starting with the same alphabet and on top of that similar family names could cause hindrance in data search or else cause clash of interest.

In the Western World, this controversial aspect has been solved to a greater extent. For instance, *New England Journal of Medicine* and *British Medical Journal*, two of the most reputed medical journals from the United States of America and the United Kingdom respectively, adhere to the policy of writing the first name and the family name of the author in full but abbreviate the middle name. Examples of the latest issues of the journal can be referred to (2,3,4) and are quoted as under :

- Frank M. Sacks, Laura P. Svetkey, William M. Vollmer, ... Effects on Blood Pressure...
- Chris Griffiths, Grumit Kaur, Madeleine Gantley, ... Influences on hospital admission...
- Finaly A. McAlister, Fiona M.E. Lawson, Koon K. Teo, ... Randomized trials of secondary...

According to the aforementioned difficulties, it seems advisable to pursue the policy of writing complete form of the authors' first names to emphasize especially on oneness of identity.

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