

Citation of an Article in the References and Respect of The Order of Appearance of the Authors: Critical Analysis

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Medical publication is based on a number of well-defined rules, the most important of which are summarized by the Harvard system, the Vancouver system and the alphabetic-digital system. Experts met in Vancouver [1] and drafted rules for citing authors in an article.

And these rules, except the number of authors to quote for a reference, are more centered on the publication of an article than on its quotation in another article.

For an article by seven or more authors, it is required to mention only the first six authors and to add "et al." indicating that the list is not exhaustive.

Is abiding to this order immutable or are there cases which may be an exception? This article proposes to show the existence of the cases that can justify the exception.

Restricting the number of authors of an article in a reference to six is recognized to be a good practice for most citations. But medical publication must also abide on the three rules of scientific publication: clarity, brevity and precision [2]. And, a reference which is an integral part of the article should not be an exception.

An author can cite an article of which he is himself one of the co-authors. Insofar as he is not counted among the top six authors, in order to clearly show his participation in this writing, it would be best if his name were visible. In this case, it is proposed that this name be situated at the fifth place, before the name that precedes the "al". And, we will later discuss about the name which precedes the "al".

Another exception might be a collective article on a survey conducted in a number of countries. In such an article, a quotation

may have direct links not with the first six authors, but with an author ranked beyond that position. This can be illustrated [3] by the example below from update in anesthesia 2008; 24 (1): 42-44.

Ouro-Bang'na Maman A F, Zouménou E, Zéminkandé J, Kaboré F, Bula-Bula M, Twagirumugabe Th, Yapobi Y, Chobli M. Anaesthesia training: where and how it is conducted in French-speaking sub-saharan Africa?

An extract from this article reads: "In Cotonou (Benin) in 2007, there were 27 students of 7 different nationalities (5 from Togo, 4 from Burkina Faso, 2 from Chad, 1 from Guinea, 1 from DRC and 13 from Benin)". Of the eight authors who contributed to the writing of this article, M Chobli, from Benin and Head of the Beninese school for the training of anesthetists, obviously seems to be the source of information.

Making a quote by mentioning only the first six names as authors, namely Ouro-Bang'na Maman A F, Zouménou E, Zéminkandé J, Kaboré F, Bula-Bula M, Twagirumugabe Th et al. would make it loose precision as regards to the source of information. However, if the name of Chobli is made visible as a resource person, who he is by the way, would bring more information to the reader.

Finally, it is worth to say a word about the principal investigator whose name, according to the rules, must be placed at the end of the list of the authors. For a quote from an article of more than six authors, the name of the principal investigator would be found in the basket of authors not cited by name.

However, through his personality, the principal investigator can bring not only a certain scientific guarantee but also, by his influence, attract the curiosity of the readers. It would be wasteful to deprive oneself of such publicity. It may be desirable to have

the name of the principal investigator in a prominent place among the references, for example as the sixth author, just before the "al." quoted above and that, in exchange, the name of the sixth author in the original article is dumped in the group of the unnamed authors

Ultimately, we propose, in the references for a collective article, that the first place of the name of the first author is immutable, that the name of the principal investigator should always appear and that the names of the other authors can fluctuate according to the need.

References

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