



Transparency in medical writing: Medical writers leading the way

by Jenny Fanstone

In recent years, the role of medical writers has come under increasing scrutiny from both the medical and lay press and it is important that we, as medical writers, take positive steps to be open and transparent about our work. To provide guidance to our writers, clients and authors, and from our own need to be seen as an ethical company, Caudex Medical Ltd. has created an acknowledgements policy that offers leadership in achieving this transparency.

Caudex Medical acknowledgements policy

Caudex policy was developed following a review of position statements and information provided by key medical writing, publications and pharmaceutical industry associations, including EMWA, ICMJE, GPP and WAME. At that time, the EMWA guidance was the most comprehensive; furthermore, it affirmed the value of the involvement of professional writers in medical communications, reflecting our aims in creating an acknowledgements policy. Caudex thus decided to align itself with the EMWA guidelines.

Acknowledgements statements

Having created an acknowledgement statement, Caudex recognizes that in some circumstances, flexibility in the wording is essential. Journal requirements and the role that either an individual writer or a team from Caudex have played in the writing process are two such cases, and so options exist for either 'Caudex Medical' or the individual writer's name to be included. In all cases, the involvement of the sponsor is disclosed.

The default statements recommended by Caudex are:

*The authors take full responsibility for the content of this paper but thank Caudex Medical (supported by **sponsor name**) for their assistance in preparing the first draft of the manuscript* and collating the comments of the authors and other named contributors.*

Or, if acknowledgement of the individual writer is preferred:

*The authors take full responsibility for the content of this paper but thank **name plus qualifications** (Caudex Medical; supported by **sponsor name**) for their assistance in preparing the first draft of the manuscript* and collating the comments of the authors and other named contributors.*

Including your clients

From its inception we have been repeatedly asked by other writers and agencies how our clients have reacted to the

introduction of this policy. Others who have tried to do a similar thing have experienced negativity from their clients. It invariably emerges that when approaching the client with their recommendation, writers and agencies don't have a policy document – they mention that it would be good to include a statement and may do so at the end of the manuscript-writing process, but still they encounter great reluctance and inevitably the experiment falters.

Caudex experience has shown that the key is in having a policy document to back up your suggestion; by showing it to your client, they can see the careful consideration that has gone into your proposal. Through the inclusion of references to statements made by medical writing, publisher and industry associations, it is possible to demonstrate the research that has been done and the weight of support behind the initiative. And with journals increasingly including the requirement for such disclosure in their *Instructions to Authors*, the need for transparency is easy to prove.

Client response

In our experience, the Caudex acknowledgments policy has been received favourably both by new clients, to whom we have introduced the policy at pitch stage, and established clients with whom we have been working for substantial periods of time. In each case the client has recognized the proactivity of Caudex in this field and held us in high regard for our stance, and it is felt within Caudex that this factor may already have been an extra point in winning business.

The policy has been accepted well by authors, also; indeed, by including it as a default addition to every manuscript at first draft stage, it is seldom remarked upon, and seen as a natural and automatic part of the writing process.

Choosing to work with an ethical company that is proud to stand up and *be seen* to be acting ethically reflects well on our clients in the eyes of both clinicians and, we hope, journal editors.

Jenny Fanstone

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* Adapt role if necessary