Editorial

Inappropriate Attribution: The “Lazy Author Syndrome”

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In recent years, there has been a disturbing trend in medical articles to casually, but wrongfully, attribute scientific findings to the author of the latest review in the field, rather than to the scientist(s) who originally described the finding. This is a disservice to the readers of the article, who are given inaccurate information, and an affront to the scientists, whose contribution is not properly recognized. I believe one reason for the increasing frequency of this practice is that authors in search of a reference to support a given statement seek the easiest way: they enter a couple of key words in the MEDLINE search and cite the latest review article that is indexed by these words. This is a lot faster than actually reading the article and seeking the original research article from which the cited facts have been derived. The latest such example, which prompted me to write this letter, is a review article by Ruddy on the benefits of angiotensin blockade in diabetic nephropathy.\(^1\) In this, he describes my work, published in the *Lancet* in 1971: “Experimental infusions of angiotensin II have been shown to produce necrotizing arterial lesions, multifocal myocardial lesions and renal tubular necrosis.” But the supporting reference is a review article published in 2000 in the *Journal of Human Hypertension*.

I believe Journal editors and referees should discourage this practice. It is unfair to researchers, does not promote scientific accuracy, and conveys the message that it is acceptable to cut corners in small ways for the sake of expediency.

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