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Consensus on the application of generative artificial intelligence in medical manuscript writing

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become integral to medical writing, offering significant benefits in linguistic refinement and efficiency, particularly for non-native English speakers. However, its adoption is challenged by risks such as reference fabrication, authorship disputes, and data confidentiality breaches. While major publishers have introduced AI-related policies, significant heterogeneity remains in their operational granularity and technical requirements. This lack of harmonization creates "regulatory uncertainty" for researchers, necessitating an expert-led consensus to provide consistent, practice-oriented guidance while safeguarding research integrity.

Methods: A systematic review of publicly available AI policies from 15 leading publishing organizations was conducted to identify convergences and divergences in ethical principles and operational guidance. Based on this review, a modified Delphi process was undertaken involving a multidisciplinary expert panel to develop consensus recommendations for the responsible use of generative AI in medical manuscript writing.

Results: The panel reached consensus on three deliverables: (1) overarching principles emphasizing data authenticity, transparent disclosure of AI use, and full human accountability with explicit prohibition of AI authorship; (2) section-specific guidance defining permissible and prohibited AI applications across all manuscript components, including strict restrictions on AI-generated references and any AI fabrication or alteration of data-derived images; and (3) a standardized, section-by-section disclosure checklist to facilitate consistent reporting and editorial review.

Discussion: The consensus offers a structured and actionable framework for AI-assisted medical writing. Emphasizing transparency, data authenticity, and full human responsibility, the consensus advocates responsible use of AI to facilitate academic research and communication.

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is gaining widespread adoption in academic writing, including the medical and biomedical sciences. Cutting-edge large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Gemini and Grok, are transforming scientific writing workflows. These technologies excel at refining language, correcting grammar, and enhancing stylistic elements, rendering them especially valuable for researchers who are non-native English speakers.[1] Reported benefits also include workload reduction and time savings.[2,3] By mitigating linguistic barriers and elevating the clarity of manuscripts, AI-assisted writing has emerged as a staple in science research and publication, demanding acknowledgment in contemporary scholarly practices.[4] In the Medicine and Biomedicine fields, where precise language and clarity are critical, the allure of AI-assisted writing is particularly strong.[5]

Nevertheless, incorporating AI into manuscript preparation has sparked significant apprehension among academic publishers. Key concerns include reference fabrication,[6,7] misattributed authorship,[8] inappropriate image generation,[9] confidentiality breaches when unpublished data are input into AI systems,[10] biases,[11] and attribution—who is responsible if AI generates flawed content.[12] To address these challenges, major publishers and journals have begun to release policies defining the boundaries of responsible AI use. Protecting research integrity amid the rise of generative AI has become a central concern across scientific disciplines.[13]

From the publishers' perspective, policies on AI use have begun to emerge, but are far from uniform. Some reviews suggest that many publisher policies remain inadequate to guide safe and ethical AI use, leaving authors uncertain about acceptable practices.

Against this backdrop, the development of a consensus on AI-assisted manuscript writing is both opportune and necessary. Such a consensus can provide clear and practical guidance for researchers, editors, and institutions, ensuring that AI is applied responsibly while safeguarding academic integrity.

To establish a foundation for this consensus, we conducted a systematic review of AI-related editorial policies across 15 leading publishing organizations. This review aimed to identify the core convergences and divergences in how these organizations govern generative AI. While there is a nearly universal consensus permitting the use of AI in supportive roles, significant variations persist in operational granularity. Specifically, publishers differ in their requirements for technical reporting, their stance on AI-generated visuals, and the extent of guidance provided for managing research integrity. These identified gaps across major publishing frameworks underscore the

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urgent need for a harmonized, expert-led consensus to provide consistent, practice-oriented guidance for researchers.

This consensus advocates for a constructive and responsible integration of AI into medical manuscript writing. Rather than rejecting AI outright, we propose embracing its power for linguistic clarity, methodological support, and research efficiency. Nevertheless, human authors bear the ultimate responsibility for the manuscript's integrity. This mandate precludes the use of generative AI for producing primary data, ensuring that all reported findings originate solely from authentic research activities.

Recognizing that AI technologies continue to mature, we regard this consensus as a foundational yet evolving document. We commit to periodic updates to ensure these recommendations remain aligned with the latest innovations and the shifting ethical landscape of scholarly publishing.

2. Methods

2.1. Selection strategy

To ensure the consensus is grounded in the most influential and representative standards, we utilized a purposive sampling strategy to select 15 leading publishing organizations (Table 1. Source Catalog of AI-Related Editorial Policies for the 15 Selected Publishing Organizations.). These entities were categorized into four strategic groups: (1) The 'Big Five' global commercial publishers (Elsevier, Wiley, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE), which establish umbrella policies for the majority of the world's scholarly output; (2) Flagship medical and general science networks (JAMA Network, BMJ, The Lancet, NEJM, and Science), representing the highest tier of clinical editorial authority and research integrity; (3) Leaders in native Open-Access publishing (Frontiers, MDPI, and PLOS), who pioneer transparency standards in digital-first dissemination; and (4) Prominent specialty and academic platforms (Lippincott/Wolters Kluwer and Oxford Academic), ensuring the inclusion of specialty-specific clinical perspectives and esteemed university press frameworks.

2.2. Review of AI policies across major publishers

Our systematic review of 15 selected publishing organizations reveals a heterogeneous regulatory landscape regarding generative AI. While there is a solid consensus on ethical boundaries, the practical guidance provided to authors is diverse.

2.2.1. Foundational convergences

Across all 15 frameworks—including commercial giants like Elsevier, Wiley and Springer Nature, as well as flagship clinical networks like JAMA and The Lancet—there is a unanimous agreement on three core pillars:

- A unanimous prohibition of AI authorship: No publisher recognizes AI as a legal entity capable of fulfilling established authorship criteria.
- Human Accountability: Authors bear 100% responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and lack of plagiarism in AI-assisted content.
- Required Disclosure: Transparent declaration of AI use is required, typically in the Methods or Acknowledgments sections.

2.2.2. Operational divergences

The divergence between shared ethical principles and their operational implementation lies between these policies. Our analysis identifies a clear spectrum of strictness:

The directive frameworks: Publishers such as Elsevier, JAMA Network, BMJ and Springer Nature provide highly specific instructions. For instance, Elsevier requires a dedicated "Declaration of Generative AI" section with a standardized statement template. Springer Nature, JAMA and BMJ go further by requiring authors to specify the model name, version, manufacturer, and the exact nature of the content generated. Wiley even prompts authors to disclose whether AI altered their thinking on key arguments.

The principle-oriented frameworks: In contrast, platforms like SAGE, NEJM, and Oxford Academic currently maintain more flexible policies. They mandate disclosure but offer less guidance on the format or depth of that disclosure (e.g., whether specific prompts or access dates must be recorded). This leaves authors in a state of "regulatory uncertainty," potentially leading to under-reporting or inconsistent declarations.

2.2.3. Content-specific restrictions. A significant divergence exists regarding non-textual content

The strict adopters: Science and Springer Nature (including The Lancet) maintain a highly conservative stance, generally prohibiting AI-generated or AI-altered images and figures to prevent potential data manipulation.

The adaptive adopters: PLOS, MDPI, and Frontiers offer more permissive guidelines for AI-assisted visuals (such as schematics or diagrams), provided the generative process is reproducible and fully documented.

2.2.4. Privacy and confidentiality

While most policies focus on the author's output, guidance on the input side remains inconsistent. While Wiley, Wolters Kluwer (Lippincott), and Elsevier provide explicit warnings against uploading unpublished manuscripts or patient data into LLMs, other frameworks

Table 1
Source catalog of AI-related editorial policies for the 15 selected publishing organizations.

Organizations	URL
Elsevier	https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/generative-ai-policies-for-journals
Wiley	https://www.wiley.com/en-us/publish/book/resources/ai-guidelines/
SAGE	https://www.sagepub.com/journals/publication-ethics-policies/artificial-intelligence-policy
Science	https://www.science.org/content/page/science-journals-editorial-policies
Taylor & Francis	https://taylorandfrancis.com/our-policies/ai-policy/
MDPI	https://www.mdpi.com/about/announcements/5687
Frontiers	https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/artificial-intelligence/for-authors/author-guidelines
PLOS	https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/ethical-publishing-practice#loc-artificial-intelligence-tools-and-technologies
NEJM	https://www.nejm.org/about-nejm/editorial-policies
The Lancet	https://www.thelancet.com/editorial-policies
BMJ	https://authors.bmj.com/policies/ai-use/
Wolters Kluwer	https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/solutions/lippincott-journals/lippincott-journals-ethical-best-practices-in-scholarly-publishing
JAMA	https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/pages/instructions-for-authors?utm_source=chatgpt.com#SecUseofAIinPublicationandResearch
Oxford Academic	https://academic.oup.com/pages/for-authors/books/author-use-of-artificial-intelligence
Springer Nature	https://www.springernature.com/gp/policies/editorial-policies

Table 2
Author disclosure of AI use by manuscript section.

Manuscript section	AI used? (Yes/No)	Tool name & version	Purpose of use (e.g., grammar, style, drafting)	Approx. extent of AI contribution (e.g., < 5%, 5–20%)	Human verification completed? (Yes/No)	Other disclosure	Editors' comments
Title							
Abstract							
Introduction							
Materials & Methods							
Results (text)							
Results – Figures							
Results – Tables							
Discussion							
Conclusion							
References							
Other (e.g. cover letter, response to reviewers)							

lack detailed protocols for safeguarding clinical confidentiality during the drafting phase.

2.3. Consensus development (Modified Delphi process)

This consensus was developed using a modified Delphi process, ensuring a rigorous, structured, and iterative approach to expert consultation. The process was coordinated by a multidisciplinary panel of 38 experts. The panel's diverse composition—clinicians (21), biomedical scientists (9), materials scientists (3), bioinformaticians (1), AI engineers (1), statisticians (1), publishers (1), and journal editors (1)—was strategically designed to address the ethical, operational, and technical complexities of generative AI across scientific disciplines.

The development followed a three-stage iterative workflow:

Initial framework and policy review: A core working group conducted a systematic review of AI editorial policies across 15 major publishers to draft the preliminary recommendations.

Iterative consultation rounds: The draft was subjected to two formal rounds of critical review. In each round, panel members independently evaluated the recommendations and provided structured feedback on clarity, feasibility, and ethical rigor. Between rounds, the facilitating committee synthesized the comments, opinions, identified areas of divergence, and revised the draft to incorporate expert suggestions.

Consensus finalization: Divergent views (e.g., regarding AI-generated visuals and technical reporting granularity) were resolved through focused multidisciplinary deliberations and follow-up communications until a unanimous consensus was reached. The final recommendations were formally ratified by all panel members, ensuring the guidelines are both robust and practically applicable to contemporary medical publishing.

2.4. Artificial intelligence use

Gemini 3 (Google) and ChatGPT 5.2 (OpenAI), were employed to facilitate conceptual framework construction, support information retrieval, and linguistic enhancement during the manuscript writing.

3. Results

Drawing upon our systematic policy review and the broader scholarly discussion surrounding AI's role in manuscript writing, we propose the following consensus recommendations for the responsible integration of AI in manuscript preparation. These recommendations align with the most rigorous publisher policies while incorporating insights from recent literature on AI ethics, image integrity, and scholarly accountability.

3.1. Overarching principles

3.1.1. Embracing the power of AI while safeguarding data authenticity

We advocate for a constructive and proactive integration of generative AI to enhance scientific communication and research efficiency. However, AI tools must never be used to generate, supplement, or manipulate primary research data, clinical observations, or experimental results. Ensuring that all findings originate from authentic research activities remains the non-negotiable foundation of academic integrity.

3.1.2. Disclosure on the use of AI tools

Authors should disclose any substantive use of generative AI and indicate which parts of the manuscript were AI-assisted. The disclosure should be clear, readily accessible, and placed in a clearly designated section (e.g., the Acknowledgements), or provided as a separate disclosure document if required by the journal. The statement should include the tool name (and version/model), the purpose of use, and the sections affected, and briefly describe how the authors verified AI-assisted content. Authors should not upload identifiable patient information or confidential/unpublished data to external AI tools.[14] We therefore provide a self-check form for authors to disclose AI use by manuscript section (Table 2. Author disclosure of AI use by manuscript section).

3.1.3. Authorship and accountability

AI tools must never be listed as authors. Authorship entails intellectual contribution, accountability for accuracy, final approval of the submitted version, and responsibility for addressing post-publication questions or investigations—functions that require human agency and cannot be fulfilled by AI systems.[15] Accordingly, human authors retain full responsibility for their entire manuscript, including the accuracy of factual statements, references, and figures/images, regardless of whether any AI assistance was used.

3.2. Section-level application guidance

3.2.1. abstract

AI may be used to draft or edit the abstract for clarity and concision. Authors must verify that the abstract accurately reflects the study design, results, and conclusions, and must not introduce any new claims or numbers not supported by the manuscript. Any substantive AI use should be disclosed.

3.2.2. Introduction

AI may assist in drafting or editing the Introduction based on author-provided notes and references. Authors must independently verify

all factual statements and every citation, as generative systems may produce fabricated or inaccurate references ("hallucinations").[16–18]

3.2.3. Methods

AI tools may be used to improve clarity and readability of the Methods section, but must not be used to invent, infer, or "complete" experimental procedures, parameters, or results that were not actually performed or documented. If generative AI is used as part of the research methodology (e.g., hypothesis generation, experimental design support, or computational screening), it should be reported as a reproducible method, including the tool/model, inputs and data provenance, key prompts/parameters where applicable, and a clear description of human verification and independent validation. For example, Google Research and Yale University publicly reported that the Gemma-based Cell2Sentence-Scale 27B (C2S-Scale 27B) model generated a novel, context-dependent cancer immunotherapy hypothesis that was subsequently validated in laboratory experiments, illustrating how AI can support methodological discovery when embedded in a transparent, human-led workflow.[19] In all cases, input data must be authentic, the analytical workflow transparent, and all AI-supported outputs independently validated by human researchers.

3.2.4. Results

Generative AI must not be used to generate, manipulate, or fabricate the actual results, datasets, statistical outputs, or any data-derived figures/images. All reported results must originate from genuine experimental or analytical work. Authors should retain original/raw data and unprocessed image files, along with a complete record of processing steps (e.g., logs or metadata), for editorial or peer-review verification when required. AI may be used only for language refinement (grammar, clarity, and style) of the Results text and must not introduce new findings, numbers, or interpretations beyond the verified results.

3.2.5. Discussion

AI may be used to draft the Discussion, including analysis and reasoning based on the study's authentic results, provided that all interpretations are traceable to the underlying data and cited evidence. Because AI-generated reasoning may produce plausible but unsupported inferences, human authors must critically review and revise the Discussion to ensure that (1) key claims are supported by data or reliable references, (2) speculation is clearly labeled as such, and (3) no new results, numbers, or conclusions beyond the verified findings are introduced. Any substantive AI use should be disclosed. When feasible, authors should retain prompts or outputs to support accountability and post-publication clarification.

3.2.6. Conclusion

AI may be used to draft or edit the conclusion for clarity and brevity, but the conclusion must be fully determined and approved by the human authors. The conclusion must not introduce new results or claims beyond the verified findings. Any substantive AI use should be disclosed.

3.2.7. References

The use of generative AI to generate references is strongly discouraged because such systems may have the risk of introducing fabricated references.[20] AI tools may be used to suggest potentially relevant literature, but authors must manually verify every AI-suggested reference (such as authors, title, journal, year, and DOI) before inclusion since some models were trained by outdated references.[21] AI-suggested citations should never be inserted without human verification and reading of the original source. Any substantive AI use in literature searching or citation suggestion should be disclosed.

3.2.8. Images and figures

Generative AI must not be used to fabricate, reconstruct, or alter any primary research images or data-derived visuals, including but not limited to medical imaging, histology/microscopy images, gels/blots, flow cytometry plots, and any figure elements that represent experimental measurements.

AI tools may be used for generating non-data diagrams or schematics (e.g., conceptual illustrations, workflow diagrams), layout optimization, labeling assistance, and global visual adjustments (e.g., uniform brightness/contrast or resolution enhancement) provided these operations do not change scientific meaning and are applied consistently. AI-assisted visualization of biological findings may be acceptable only when it is a faithful representation of authentic underlying data and the mapping from data to visualization is transparent and reproducible; AI must not "fill in" missing structures, invent features, or modify quantitative information.

Any AI involvement in figure preparation must be transparently disclosed in the figure legend and/or Methods, specifying the tool and version/model and the exact prompts used. Authors should retain original/unprocessed image files, underlying data, and a complete record of processing steps (e.g., logs/metadata) for editorial and peer-review verification when requested.

4. Discussion

Generative artificial intelligence has become an increasingly prevalent component of contemporary scientific writing. When used responsibly, AI tools offer substantial benefits in enhancing linguistic clarity, improving manuscript structure, and supporting conceptual development, particularly within the highly technical and precision-driven domains of Medicine and Biomedicine. However, unregulated or opaque use of generative systems poses tangible risks to research integrity, authorship accountability, and public trust.

Through a systematic review of AI-related policies across major publishers, this consensus demonstrates a high degree of convergence around core principles: AI tools must not be credited as authors. Human authors retain full responsibility for all content, and transparent disclosure of AI involvement is essential. At the same time, meaningful variation persists in operational detail, disclosure granularity, and permissible scope, underscoring the need for clearer, harmonized guidance.

This consensus advocates a balanced and forward-looking framework for AI-assisted writing. If data authenticity, methodological rigor, and human intellectual oversight are rigorously maintained, the use of AI for writing, visualization, and methodological support should be regarded as acceptable and, in some contexts, advocated. AI may assist and inspire, but it must never replace human scientific judgment or accountability.

However, several limitations of this study warrant consideration. First, our review of policies is informed by a policy sample weighted toward major English-language publishers and highly visible biomedical journals; thus, it may not fully represent regional publishing ecosystems or non-English policy frameworks. Second, as generative AI and journal policies are evolving rapidly, our comparison reflects publicly available statements within a specific retrieval window and will require periodic updating to remain current. Finally, although we emphasize universal principles of disclosure and accountability, the optimal disclosure threshold and reporting format may vary across different disciplines; authors should therefore tailor their practices to specific journal requirements.

As AI technologies continue to evolve in capability, transparency, and reliability, editorial and publishing policies should likewise undergo periodic reassessment. A proactive, self-regulatory approach—-grounded in ethical principles rather than rigid prohibition—will be essential to ensuring that generative AI ultimately strengthens, rather than undermines, the rigor, transparency, and credibility of the scientific enterprise.

Declaration of responsibility

I/We hereby declare that all uses of AI tools in the preparation of this manuscript have been fully disclosed in the table above. All AI-assisted content has been carefully checked and verified by the authors. The data, images, and results reported in this manuscript are authentic and original, and the authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and scientific validity of the work.

Declaration of Competing Interest

Dr. Lufeng Ding is a AI-engineer of Shenzhen Bineogen Technology CO., Ltd. Dr. Qian Liu is editorial department editor of Thoracic Cancer. Dr. Jiang Lei is a staff member of KeAi pusbliser. Dr. Jun Wu is the Editor-in-Chief of journal Regenesis Repair Rehabilitation and journal Burn and Trauma, and the Director of the Department of Burn and Plastic Surgery, the First Affiliated Hospital of Shenzhen University.

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