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Notice of Retraction

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In a letter in this issue of the *Journal*, Coats et al.¹ request that their article, "Nonsurgical Reduction of the Interventricular Septum in Patients with Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy,"² which was published on October 24, 2002, be retracted. The reason for the retraction stems from incomplete manuscript review by the authors and false signatures on submitted documents. We publish this editorial comment not only to inform the medical community but also to prevent similar situations from arising in the future.

Of the eight persons named as authors of the article,² some claimed that they had never reviewed the original data and most claimed that they had not seen or approved either the original version or one or more of the three revised versions of the manuscript. One author claimed that he had seen neither the original data nor any version of the manuscript. Thus, there was an egregious disregard of the principles of authorship, as specified by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.³

How did this happen? During the review process, several of the authors' signatures were falsified by a coauthor (who later confirmed to us that he had done this); this falsification occurred without the knowledge of the purported signatories. There were falsified signatures on the letters of transmission accompanying the original and revised versions of the manuscript. It is never acceptable for one author to sign on behalf of another, even with that coauthor's permission. In the matter of authorship, all signatures must be genuine.

Because of the falsified signatures, we became

aware of the situation only after the article had been published. Although we never proceed with our review of a manuscript until we have the signature of each of the authors, we cannot verify the authenticity of the signatures sent to us. We believe this to be a matter of basic trust between authors and editors. However, to prevent the problem from happening again, we plan to inform all authors of record by e-mail when their manuscript is accepted.

We consider this breach of the principles of authorship a serious infraction and grounds for retracting the article. To their credit, when the offense became apparent, several of the authors of the article promptly communicated the facts to us and concurred with the need for retraction. Still, this unfortunate incident serves as a reminder to the medical community that with the privilege of authorship comes a mandate for personal and professional responsibility that must be taken very seriously. The key element of this responsibility is an understanding that the purpose of publication is to alleviate the suffering of those who are sick. What is published must therefore be completely trustworthy.

1. Coats AJS, Henein M, Flather M, et al. Retraction: Shamim et al. Nonsurgical reduction of the interventricular septum in patients with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. [Retraction of Shamim W, Yousufuddin M, Wang D, et al. In: *N Engl J Med* 2002;347:1326-33.] *N Engl J Med* 2003;348:951.

2. Shamim W, Yousufuddin M, Wang D, et al. Nonsurgical reduction of the interventricular septum in patients with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. *N Engl J Med* 2002;347:1326-33.

3. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals: updated October 2001. (Accessed February 14, 2003, at <http://www.icmje.org>.)

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