

Guidance for Journals Developing or Revising Policies on Conflict of Interest, Disclosure, or Competing Financial Interests

This document is a framework of discussion questions that journal editors, publishers, and policy makers can use when developing, reviewing, or revising their policies on conflict of interest. It was developed by the participants in the Retreat on Conflict of Interest and Scientific Publication held by the Council of Science Editors on 29-31 October 2004, with funding support from the Greenwall Foundation, the American Heart Association, and the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

We believe that scientific journals in every discipline and every country should have some form of conflict-of-interest policy. However, we recognize that conflicts of interest occur in a variety of forms and operate at different levels of importance among different journals and scientific disciplines. Thus, this document is not itself a policy, and it is not intended to be a prescription for a single, universally applicable policy.

We expect journal editors and publishers to use this document in different ways. Some may choose to address all the questions in their policies, and others may select only the questions that seem most important and appropriate to their scientific disciplines.

The questions pertain to four groups of people whose participation is essential to scientific publication: scientific authors, journal editors and editorial staff, peer reviewers, and editorial-board members.

In addition to financial and nonfinancial conflicts of interest, the questions pertain to external sources of funding and support, the role of funding sources, and access to and sharing of research data and materials.

Section VII provides links to some conflict-of-interest policies in use by scientific societies and journals. They are provided as examples.

I. Questions relevant to policy on conflict of interest for authors

1. Does the journal have a conflict-of-inter-

est policy for authors?

- a. Does the policy state when it was developed?
- b. Does the policy state who developed it (the editors, the publisher, the scientific society)?
- c. Does the policy state when it was last reviewed or updated?
- d. Does the policy cover members of the author's immediate family?

2. Does the policy include a definition of conflict of interest?

- a. Does it define conflict of interest as any interest that may raise the perception of conflict of interest or as bias?

3. Does the policy address financial interests?

- a. Does it quantify relevant financial interests (such as a threshold amount of money, a duration of time, or proximity of time)?
- b. Are examples provided?

4. Does the policy address nonfinancial types of interests?

- a. Does it address current or former personal or professional relationships?
- b. Does it address ideologic interests?
- c. Does it address unpaid management or decision-making positions, such as membership on a board of directors?
- d. Are examples provided?

5. If the policy refers to "relevant" or "important" interests, does it provide some guidance about how to interpret these terms?

6. Does the policy discuss disclosure?

- a. Are disclosures revealed to journal editors and editorial staff?
- b. Are disclosures revealed to peer reviewers? All disclosures, or selected ones?
- c. Are disclosures published for the

reader? All disclosures, or selected ones? Is publication in print, online, or both? Will published disclosures be the same in print as online?

d. Are disclosures made available to the news media? All disclosures, or selected ones?

e. Are disclosures checked in any way, such as by confirmation with the author's university, institution, employer, or funder, or by Internet search?

7. Will disclosure have any bearing on the manuscript's chances of acceptance?

8. Does the policy apply to all articles, or just some types, such as research articles, treatment guidelines, letters, book reviews, and news articles? Does the same level of disclosure apply to all types of articles?

9. Does the policy ban authors with disclosed interests from writing articles?

- a. All articles, or specific types (such as research articles, reviews, book reviews, and news pieces)?

10. Does the policy specify any option other than disclosures or bans?

11. Does the policy apply to each author equally, or are there special requirements for the principal investigator or lead author?

12. Must each author disclose conflicts of interest, or can one author answer conflict-of-interest questions for all authors?

13. If the authors have no conflicts, must they file a statement attesting that they have no relevant conflicts to disclose?

- a. Are declarations of "no conflicts to disclose" published?
- b. Are declarations of "no conflicts" checked in any way?

14. Can authors elect not to respond to the request for information about conflicts of interest?

- a. Will this have any bearing on the manuscript's chances of acceptance?
- b. If authors decline, is such information published?

15. Is compliance with the policy

- a. voluntary and encouraged?
- b. required?

16. Does the policy inform authors when disclosure is expected?

- a. At manuscript submission?
- b. During manuscript revision?
- c. At acceptance?
- d. Before publication?
- e. Does the policy specify what will happen if disclosures are not made at the appropriate time? Are reminders sent during the manuscript preparation process?
- f. If disclosures are made at submission, are they updated before publication?

17. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?

- a. Publish a correction?
- b. Publish a retraction?
- c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For how long?
- d. Report to the author's university, institution, employer, or funder?

18. How is the policy communicated to authors?

- a. Full policy provided in instructions for authors?
- b. Abbreviated policy provided in instructions for authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
- c. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
- d. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
- e. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form? How detailed is the form? Is the form available for viewing before submission, or must a potential author enter the online submission system to see it? Can the form be submitted online, or should it be printed out, signed by

hand, and mailed in?

II. Questions relevant to policy on sources of funding

1. Does the journal have a policy that authors declare all sources of support (such as commercial, government, and private funders)? Does the policy discuss both funding and nonmonetary support, such as in-kind donations (material, equipment, and so on)?

2. Does the journal have a policy requesting authors to describe the role of the funding source in the work to be published?

- a. Are examples provided (such as supplied materials, supplied funding, performed statistical analysis, or approved manuscript before publication)?
- b. Is the description to be included in the manuscript, or in a cover letter or separate form? (Submitted at manuscript submission, during manuscript revision, at acceptance, or before publication?)

3. Is compliance with this policy

- a. voluntary and encouraged?
- b. required?

4. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?

- a. Publish a correction?
- b. Publish a retraction?
- c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For how long?
- d. Report to the author's university, institution, employer, or funder?

5. How is the policy communicated to authors?

- a. Full policy provided in instructions for authors?
- b. Abbreviated policy provided in instructions for authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
- c. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
- d. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
- e. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form?

III. Questions relevant to policy

on access to data

1. Does the journal have a policy about access to data or materials?

- a. Must authors declare whether they had full access to the data reported in the article?
- b. Must authors declare whether data will be made publicly available through data-sharing, repositories, registries, and so on?
- c. Must authors declare whether data or materials will be shared?

2. Is compliance with this policy

- a. voluntary and encouraged?
- b. required?

3. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?

- a. Publish a correction?
- b. Publish a retraction?
- c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For how long?
- d. Report to the author's university, institution, employer, or funder?

4. How is the policy communicated to authors?

- a. Full policy provided with instructions for authors?
- b. Abbreviated policy provided to authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
- c. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
- d. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
- e. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form?

IV. Questions relevant to policy on conflict of interest of editors and editorial staff

1. Does the journal have a conflict-of-interest policy for editors? Is it applicable to scientific editors, managing editors, manuscript editors, and so on?

- a. Does the policy state when it was developed?
- b. Does the policy state who developed it (the editors, the publisher, the scientific society)?
- c. Does the policy state when it was last reviewed?

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2. Is it a policy of disclosure? a ban on specific types of interests? recusal from some types of editing responsibilities? or a mixture?

3. Does the policy include a definition of conflict of interest?

- a. Does it define conflict of interest as any interest that may raise the perception of conflict of interest, or as bias?

4. Does the policy address financial interests?

- a. Does it quantify relevant financial interests (such as a threshold amount of money, a duration of time, or proximity of time)?
- b. Are examples provided?

5. Does the policy address nonfinancial types of interests?

- a. Does it address current or former personal or professional relationships?
- b. Does it address ideologic interests?
- c. Does it address unpaid management or decision-making positions, such as membership on a board of directors?
- d. Are examples provided?

6. If the policy refers to “relevant” or “important” interests, does it provide some guidance about how to interpret these terms?

7. Does the policy explicitly prohibit the editor from using information in unpublished manuscripts for personal, financial, or professional gain?

8. Is compliance with this policy

- a. voluntary and encouraged?
- b. required?

9. How is the policy communicated to editors?

10. How is the policy communicated to authors?

11. What does the journal do if editors do not comply with the policy?

V. Questions relevant to policy on conflict of interest of peer reviewers

All the questions in Section IV and the following:

12. Does the policy provide guidance for a peer reviewer who is in direct professional competition with the author of an article under review? Does it encourage or require peer reviewers to recuse themselves from reviewing when they have such a conflict?

VI. Questions relevant to policy on conflict of interest of editorial-board members

All the questions in Section IV and the following:

12. Does the policy provide guidance for an editorial-board member who is in direct professional competition with the author of an article under review? Does it encourage or require editorial-board members to recuse themselves from editorial decision-making when they have such a conflict?

13. Are conflict-of-interest statements from editorial-board members publicly available (on the journal’s Web site or in the print journal)?

VII. Examples of policies on conflict of interest

Council of Science Editors editorial policies

www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/draft_approved.cfm

American Chemical Society Journals ethical guidelines for authors, editors, and peer reviewers

pubs.acs.org/instruct/ethic.html

American Physical Society ethical guidelines for publication

www.aps.org/statements/02_2.cfm

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors policy on publication ethics

www.icmje.org/sponsor.htm

Committee on Publication Ethics

www.publicationethics.org.uk/

World Association of Medical Editors

www.wame.org/pubethicrecom.htm

This document was drafted by Jessica Ancker, Annette Flanagin, and Margaret Perkins and then discussed and expanded by the participants in the Retreat on Conflict of Interest and Scientific Publication, held by the Council of Science Editors on 29-31 October 2004. The document was then reviewed and revised and was approved by the following in February 2005:

- Jessica Ancker, Joseph P. Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University
- Annette Flanagin, JAMA
- Margaret Perkins, University of Chicago Press
- Lisa Bero, School of Pharmacy and Institute for Health Policy Studies, School of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco
- Cary Gross, Department of Internal Medicine, Yale University School of Medicine
- Robert A Gross, University of Rochester Medical Center, *Neurology*
- Guadalupe Guerrero-Avendaño, Sociedad Mexicana de Radiología
- Scott C Herman, The Endocrine Society
- Wendy Husser, American College of Surgeons
- Katrina Kelner, *Science*
- Sheldon Krinsky, Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, Tufts University
- Juan Carlos Lopez, *Nature Medicine*
- Chris Lyons, American Association for Laboratory Animal Science
- John K Niparko, Johns Hopkins University
- Richard W Painter, University of Illinois College of Law
- Manoj Pandey, Trivandrum Regional Cancer Centre Medical College
- Rita Redberg, School of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco
- Drummond Rennie, JAMA
- Steven Schwid, University of Rochester Medical Center, *Neurology*
- Anju Sharma, Indian Council of Medical Research
- Polly Thompson, *Canadian Pharmaceutical Journal* 