Publication Ethics: Part 4 - Conflicts of Interest

Charon A. Pierson, PhD, GNP-BC, FAANP
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
and
Nurse Author & Editor

Objectives

- Define competing interests related to writing, reviewing, and conducting research
- Describe at least one resource for proper disclosure of competing interests
- Develop a personal strategy to avoid conflicts of interest in all conduct related to research, writing, and reviewing

Definition of Conflicts of Interest*

- Conflict of interest exists when an author (or the author’s institution), reviewer, or editor has financial or personal relationships that inappropriately influence (bias) his or her actions (such relationships are also known as dual commitments, competing interests, or competing loyalties).
- COI can be financial, academic/corporate competition, or intellectual passion
- It is the potential for COI or the appearance of a possible COI that is of greatest concern
- For that reason, any potential COI must be disclosed

*http://www.icmje.org/ethical_4conflicts.html
Conflicts of Interest (COI)

- Apply to everyone involved in conducting research and disseminating results (sponsors, authors, reviewers, editors)
- Use the ICMJE COI Disclosure form
- Disclosures should include writing or other assistance as well as the funding source for any assistance
- Conditions of funding have potential to bias conduct and reporting of research (e.g., funding for clinical trials of new drugs)

JAANP Case – Author Disclosures

- Conflict of interest disclosure statement submitted by authors was incorrect (verbatim from the sample provided in our author guidelines stating no conflicts)
- When article published, authors contacted me stating they had never made such a statement and that what had been published was not true
- I sent a copy of their submitted statement which they had included and we had printed verbatim
- Authors apologized and sent a corrected COI disclosure
- Erratum was published correcting the Disclosure statement

JAANP Case – Reviewer Disclosure

- Request was sent to a reviewer to review a manuscript on a topic within her area of expertise
- Reviewer replied that she was in the process of writing an article herself on a closely related topic and worried that this might constitute a COI
- Is this a COI? Why or why not?
- What would you do?
Hypothetical Case – Editor’s COI

“Editors should seriously consider for publication any carefully done study of an important question, relevant to their readers, whether the results for the primary or any additional outcome are statistically significant. Failure to submit or publish findings because of lack of statistical significance is an important cause of publication bias.” (http://www.icmje.org/publishing_1negative.html)

- Why do journals not publish negative or non-significant results?

Summary

- It is the appearance of a potential conflict of interest that matters
- Be honest and thorough in declaring all potential conflicts of interest
- Use the ICMJE as a guide when considering potential conflicts of interest
- Many of the scandals in bioscience today have resulted from researchers’ and writers’ undeclared competing interests