Conflicts of Interest

University of Milan, 23 February 2017

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EMBO
Overview

✓ What are conflicts of interest in science?
✓ How common are they?
✓ Do conflicts of interest matter?
✓ Conflicts of interest in peer review
✓ What to do about your conflict(s) of interest
✓ Scenario and discussion
What are Conflicts of Interest?

Conflicts of interest are situations “where financial, personal, or other considerations have the potential to compromise judgment or objectivity”.

Doing Global Science, IAP 2016
Conflicts of Interest in science

- Financial
- Personal
- Professional
- Scholarly

SCIENCE
Conflicts of Interest in science

- **Financial**
  - Consulting fees
  - Royalties
  - Financial benefits to family members

- **Personal**
  - Personal contacts
  - Bonuses

- **Professional**
  - Promotion
  - Grants
  - Getting a job

- **Scholarly**
  - Advancement of a research idea
  - Link or rivalry with other researchers

- **Moral conflicts**
  - Conflicts of commitments

- **SCIENCE**
  - Getting a paper published
How common are Conflicts of Interest?

* between 23% and 28% of academic investigators received research funding from industry
* over 40% received research-related gifts
* about 33% had personal financial ties with industry sponsors.

These are not bad per se if managed responsibly.
How common are Conflicts of Interest?

An AUTM 1999 survey: 68% of academic research institutions in USA and Canada held equity in companies that sponsored research there.

Association of University Technology Managers, USA, 1999
Do Conflicts of Interest matter?

How the Sugar Industry Shifted Blame to Fat

By ANAHAD O’CONNOR  SEP. 12, 2016  New York Times
Do Conflicts of Interest matter?

Why review articles on the health effects of passive smoking reach different conclusions.
Barnes DE¹, Bero LA.

- 37% review articles: passive smoking is not harmful.
- 73% of these were by scientists with tobacco industry affiliations.
Do Conflicts of Interest matter?

**Jesse Gelsinger’s case**
- University of Pennsylvania, 1999
- Gene therapy trial (adenovirus as vector)
- PI: James Wilson

*The Death of Jesse Gelsinger: New Evidence of the Influence of Money and Prestige in Human Research*
Robin Fretwell Wilson  
*Washington and Lee University School of Law, wilsonrf@wlu.edu*
American Journal of Law Medicine 2010
Conflicts of Interest do matter!

Conflicts of interest might influence scientists’ behaviour.

Conflicts of interest can harm humans, animals and the environment.

Public policies can be based on flawed studies.

Conflicts of interest endanger public trust in the independence and unbiased judgment of scientists.
WHAT TO DO?

**Comply** with institutional and governmental regulations on CoI:

- University of Milan new position paper
- University of Milan ethical code
Manage your conflicts of interest

- Disclose – At the beginning of a project!
- Seek advice if you are unsure!
- Reduce
- Eliminate
Conflicts of Interest in peer-review

Peer-review = Self regulation in science
Aim: maintain standards of quality!

Referee for scientific journals.

Reviewer on a selection committee.
Conflicts of Interest in peer-review

The core of EMBO’s activities is based on peer-review:

◆ Fellowships
◆ Courses and workshops
◆ Young Investigators
◆ EMBO press

Aim: Maintain standards of quality!
Conflicts of Interest as a Referee

Personal Conflicts of Interest. If a reviewer:

- Works at the same institution as any of the authors (or will be joining that institution or is applying for a job there).
- He/she is or has been recent (e.g. within the past 3 years) mentor, mentee, close collaborator or joint grant holder.
- He/she has a close personal relationship with any of the authors.

COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers 2013
Conflicts of interest as a Referee

Referee Guidelines

IF YOU HAVE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST REGARDING THE MANUSCRIPT YOU HAVE BEEN ASKED TO REVIEW (E.G. IT COMPETES WITH YOUR OWN WORK), PLEASE IMMEDIATELY DELETE THE MANUSCRIPT FILE AND DECLINE TO REFEREE.
WHAT TO DO?

Disclose any potential conflicts of interest!

Seek advice from the journal if you are unsure!
Conflicts of interest