

# **Conflict of interest**

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*Indian Journal of Medical Ethics and  
The National Medical Journal of India*

*“Communication for Biomedical Scientists*  
is a book that ..... the editors have  
also included ... excellent  
articles on how to select the right  
journal (with the expected reference to  
impact factors!) and on conflict of interest  
(while on this topic, I must state a  
personal conflict of interest – this essay,  
along with three others are written by  
friends of mine).”

*Current Science, 2004*

# Conflict of interest

- Exists when there is a divergence between an individual's private interests and his/her responsibilities to scientific publishing such that a reasonable observer might wonder if the individual's judgement was motivated by those interests

- WAME

# Conflict of interest

- Competing interest
- Bias

# COI – who does it apply to ?

- Journal publisher/owner
- Editor of the journal
- Author/researcher
- Referee

# A brief history....

- *NEJM*, 1984, 1990, 2002
- COPE, 2000
- *NMJI*, ~2000
- *IJME*, ~2005
- ICMJE, 1985, 2009 and 2010

# Authors and COI

- Financial
- Non-financial

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# Financial conflict of interest

- Quantifiable
- Research funds....“research” funds ?
- Conference travel, small/big gifts, speaking at pharma sponsored conferences
- Hidden persuaders

# Conflict of interest

- Of 56 trials funded by NSAID manufacturers, all were favourable to the company!
- Only 5% of cancer drugs had unfavourable outcomes in study sponsored by company – but 38% when funded by nonprofit agencies

# Andrew Wakefield affair

- MMR vaccine and autism, *The Lancet*, 1998
- COI not stated, discovered in 2004
- Professional misconduct, no IRB approval
- Data manipulation

# Nancy Olivieri versus Apotex

- Deferiprone in a trial for Thalassemia, 1996
- Worsens hepatic fibrosis
- Could not publish for lack of permission from sponsor

# Are guidelines reliable ?

- DSM-IV
- AHA and Alteplase
- National Cholesterol Education program
- IMA and Quaker Oats and Tropicana !

**“Is academic medicine for sale ?”**

Angell, *NEJM*, 2000

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# Is academic medicine for sale ?

- “These days, everything is for sale”
- “No, the current owner is very happy with it”

“Medical journals are an extension  
of the marketing arm of  
pharmaceutical companies”

Smith, *PLoS Medicine*, 2005

Can we trust the evidence in  
evidence-based medicine ?

*JABFP, 2005*

"Excellent indictment of drug companies and their research and business practices...brilliant, persuasive and shocking"  
—John H. Garvey, The New York Times

## The Truth About the Drug Companies



HOW THEY DECEIVE US  
AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

MARCIA ANGELL, M.D.

Special value for only \$1.99  
Includes shipping and handling  
charges of the real world.

Revised and updated  
Includes tips on what you can do to protect your interests

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**Sleeping with the enemy ?**

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# Effects of declared COI on readers

- Readers are less likely to believe data when conflict of interest is declared by the authors

# Refereeing

- Avoid same department/institution
- Try to avoid refereeing a paper when you are working on the same subject!

# What can be done ?

- Register all clinical trials and state the details of the protocol
- Try to avoid being part of industry-sponsored trials [“conscientious objector”]
- Full disclosure: for authors and reviewers
- Exclude conflicted experts – and learned bodies- from guideline panels!
- Journals should critique, not publish trials

# **NMJI statement on COI**

- *Conflict of interest*

A conflict of interest exists when a financial or personal relationship of the author may inappropriately influence his or her actions. Conflicts may be personal, commercial, political, academic, or financial. Some examples of financial conflicts of interest include employment, research funding (received or pending), stock or share ownership, payment for lectures or travel, consultancies and non-monetary support. Conflicts, or their absence, must be stated in writing by all authors at the time of submission of the article. The Journal may use information disclosed in conflict of interest and financial interest statements as a basis for editorial decisions. Sources of full or partial funding or other support for the research must be declared. For more information please see [www.icmje.org](http://www.icmje.org).

# Editors and conflict of interest

- Political beliefs [*JAMA*, Lundberg, 1998]
- Personal/academic beliefs
- Personal relationships
- Financial benefit

# Editors and conflict of interest

- Lundh et al, *PLoS Medicine*, 2010
- *NEJM*, 2005-2006: 66 trials sponsored totally by industry, 95 partly supported
- 41% of *Lancet's* income is from reprints
- A single reprint order for *NEJM* may mean an extra income of US\$1 million!
- Impact factors would reduce vastly were it not for trial papers

# Some homework

- Look up papers by Joel Lexchin
- Google “Charles Nemeroff”