Conflicts of Interest

Craig A. Smith, DVM, PhD, DACT
Associate Editor

Conflict of Interest

Conflicting or competing interests that could affect objectivity or bias an editorial decision

Individuals = Authors, reviewers, editors, and members of editorial board

Sponsors

Conflicts can be:

Factual or perceived

Financial, personal, professional

Geographic, political-ideological

Guidelines

CSE’s White Paper on Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications
http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/editorial_policies/white_paper.cfm

AMA Style Guide, 10th edition

Conflict of Interest Statements

Gained wider use in 1980s

1997 – Survey of high-impact biomedical and science journals only 181 of 1,396 (13%) had a conflict of interest statement

2005 – 84 high-impact journals 80% had conflict of interest statement… but only 33% were published publicly (eg, Instructions for Authors)
Authors - Conflict of Interest

Financial
Employment, stock ownership, honoraria, royalties, patents, grants, consultancy, expert testimony, travel costs and accommodations
Support from industry, government, or private agencies
Support = Financial, equipment, supplies

Authors - Conflict of Interest

ALL authors must provide disclosure
Disclosure should also include involvement with products or companies in competition with those in the manuscript

Authors - Conflict of Interest

Time frame
Within past 5 years
Foreseeable future
Threshold amount (eg, ≥ $10,000)

Authors - Conflict of Interest

Additional assistance—contribution of each nonauthor to the study

*Special situation*
Independent statistical review required for industry-supported studies

Authors - Conflict of Interest

Various types of articles
Report of original research
Review articles
Opinion articles (eg, Commentary)
Letters to the editor
Book reviews

Authors - Conflict of Interest

Separate cover letter
Separate disclosure form
Included in manuscript
Peer reviewers - Conflict of Interest

- Financial
- Professional
- Personal

Journal may require a statement from reviewers verifying no relevant conflict of interest

Editors and Editorial Boards Conflict of Interest

- Disclosure of relevant financial or other conflict of interest
- Journal may require annual statement of disclosure and to verify acknowledgement of policies on conflict of interest

Sponsors - Conflict of Interest

- Financial, equipment, supplies

Role of sponsors
- Design and conduct of study
- Collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of data
- Preparation, review, approval of manuscript

Ensure sponsors have not controlled author’s right to publication

What do we do with this information?

Editor or Editorial Board conflict of interest

- Should I be involved with the processing of this manuscript?
  - Author from your institution
  - Editor is author
  - Other personal or professional issues

Resolving Editor or Editorial Board conflict of interest

- Assign to other member of Editorial Board
- Assign to Guest Editor
Consideration for publication

May ban certain types of articles (eg, commentary) on the basis of financial or other bias of author
May ban articles on the basis of sponsor support
May reject articles when all requirements have not been met (eg, independent statistical analysis)

Ensuring the peer-review process is appropriate

Assign peer reviewers
Allow authors to suggest potential reviewers
Allow authors to request certain reviewers be excluded
-Justification or explanation for exclusion

Disclosure of author information to reviewers

Depends on:
- Policy of the journal
- Blinding of peer review
- Relevance of information

Disclosure of author information to readers

Only relevant information needs to be published
Publish all relevant financial information
-Include in acknowledgments
-Include financial disclosure form
Publish actions or activities

Disclosure of author information to readers

Disclaimer of nonactions or nonevents
-Authors and nonauthors
-Sponsors
Disclaimer when author of an article is an editor or on editorial board for the journal

Undisclosed conflict of interest

Before publication
—No effect on publication
—Reject manuscript
After publication:
—Publish letter of explanation
Inform funding sources or employer
Ban on future submissions
Conflict of Interest

- Develop a policy
- Inform authors and others of the policy
- Adhere to or enforce the policy

Questions?

Reviewer response--example

Thank you for asking me to review this manuscript. I must inform you that I recently reviewed it for another journal. I identified several flaws in the previous submission, but I am interested in reviewing it for your journal because...

Response of Reviewer A

I offered some solutions to the authors that I believe, if incorporated in this revision, will make the manuscript acceptable for publication.

Response of Reviewer B

I want to see how the authors addressed those concerns, although I don’t believe that the revision can make it acceptable for publication.

Use neither reviewer
Use reviewer A but not reviewer B
Use reviewer B but not reviewer A
Use both reviewers

Does the decision change if:
- First 2 reviewers asked?
- Already asked 12 other reviewers?