

Medical Journals, the News Media and Conflict of Interest

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- What is a conflict of interest?
- Why focus on financial conflicts of interest?
- What issues do financial conflicts raise for medical journals?
- How have medical journals responded to financial conflicts?
- What is the role of the news media?

What is a conflict of interest?

“A conflict of interest is a set of conditions in which professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as a patient’s welfare or the validity of research) tends to be unduly influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain).”

Dennis F. Thompson, NEJM, August
1993

“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.”

ICMJE, November 2003

Why focus on financial conflicts
of interest?

“Financial relationships (such as employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, paid expert testimony) are the most easily identifiable conflicts of interest and the most likely to undermine the credibility of the journal, the authors, and of science itself.”

ICMJE, November 2003

What issues do financial
associations raise for medical
journals?

How have medical journals
responded to financial conflicts?

Responses to Financial Conflicts

- Disclosure of relevant associations
- Prohibition of financial associations in specified situations
- Accountability of authors for conduct of trials
- Public registration of clinical trials

“Disclosure doesn’t resolve a conflict of interest; all it does is reveal that a conflict exists.”

Robert Steele, the Poynter Institute,
July 2003

‘It has become a truism on Wall Street that conflicts of interest are unavoidable. In fact, most of them only seem so, because avoiding them makes it harder to get rich. That’s why full disclosure is so popular: It requires no substantive change.’”

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What is the role of the news
media?