

Financial Conflicts of Interest in Academic-Industry Relationships in Biomedical Research: Shared Responsibility and Individual Integrity

An Investigator-Initiated Response

Relationships between academia and industry are a fundamental and essential part of the modern life science enterprise. However, the increase in number and complexity of these relationships has been accompanied by concerns about financial conflicts of interest (COI). Rules and policies of government, institutions, professional societies, and journals guide the oversight of academic-industry relationships. To date, many of the policy recommendations have focused on the role of institutions whereas the role of investigators has not been as well-identified. The actions of investigators as a group will determine the effectiveness of policies and practices, and there is a clear need for the articulation of standards for the conduct of academia-industry interactions from the scientists' perspective. The lack of clarity and consistency in some areas may cause confusion and noncompliance by investigators. FASEB recently published a statement of principles for investigators to address challenges as a result of financial relationships with industry.

Objectives

With funding from the ORI-AAMC RCR Program for Academic Societies to Promote Research Integrity we seek to increase awareness of these issues on the part of investigators and call for implementation of more consistent voluntary policies and practices. FASEB convened coalition of stakeholders and experts to develop recommendations and develop an action plan to implement them. Three guiding principles were identified:

- Investigators must conduct research activities objectively
- Investigators must operate with transparency
- Investigators must be accountable to all stakeholders

A "Conflict of Interest Toolkit" is in development that will contain resources for

investigators, institutions, journals, and societies that may be used to achieve these principles and guide individual financial relationships between academia and industry.

Call to Action

The broader community has a shared responsibility to ensure public trust in research. A public statement from the investigator perspective will serve to promote the effectiveness of policies and practices. We call on societies and organizations to:

- Consider the endorsement of a national standard guideline for the disclosure and management of academic-industry relationships in biomedical research that would allow for local implementation but based on the principles of objectivity, transparency, and accountability
- Tell us what you are doing in this area and submit materials that might be included in the COI Toolkit as well as provide ideas on how such a Toolkit might help develop your own activities
- Participate in a "Call to Action" meeting Tuesday, July 17 from 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. at the National Academies in Washington, DC. to participate in a discussion with other scientific societies and stakeholders on the process of implementation of initiatives, including the COI Toolkit

Maintaining the public trust and assuring the integrity of research is of the highest importance. Better tools will serve to benefit the public and scientific community by fostering a healthy relationship between academia and industry.

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