Responsible Conduct of Research: Conflict of Interest

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“While the concept of conflict of interest is clearly in vogue in discussions around health policy and the term is used in many different contexts, it is hard to find a clear definition of it.”

Conflict of Interest: a definition

“A COI 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).”

D. Thompson (1993)
Understanding Financial Conflicts of Interests (NEJM, 329(8), 573)
Conflict of Interest: a definition

"a situation in which a person, such as a public official, an employee, or a professional, has a private or personal interest sufficient to appear to influence the objective exercise of his or her official duties."

Dr. Michael McDonald
http://www.armsdeal-vpo.co.za/special_items/reading/ethics.html
Conflict of Interest: UBC Definition (Policy 97)

- A university member is in a position to influence University business, research, or other that:
  - advance the Member’s own interests or the interests of a Related Party
  - are of detriment of the University’s interests, integrity or fundamental mission.
- Financial or other personal considerations may compromise an investigator’s professional judgment in conducting or reporting research.
- May be potential, actual or apparent.
In Contrast:  
Conflict of Commitment 
UBC Definition (Policy 97)

- Substantial or demanding outside professional activities affect a university member’s responsibilities to the University
- The Non-University Activities of a university member involve the use of University resources.
Conflict of Interest: The Components

• **Relationship:**
  – Trust based; (often) fiduciary in nature;

• **Conflicting interest:**
  – Any influence tending to reduce reliability of one’s judgment on a given decision;

• **Proper exercise of judgment:**
  – What people ordinarily expect or are invited to expect;
  – What is required by law, professional codes, or regulation.

Davis, M. Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics
Conflict of Interest: Influences

- Publishable Results
- Financial Incentives
- Career Advancement
- Fame or Power
- Family and Friendships
Balancing Competing Interests

- Teaching
- Committees
- Multiple Projects

- Mentoring
- Research
- Multiple Duties

- Publishing
- Grantwriting
- Multiple Grants

Conflict of Conscience
Conflict of Interest

• Situations where COI may arise:
  – Evaluation of and interaction with students
  – Increased research for private sector
    • Academic freedom vs. restricted access
    • Compensation from multiple sources
  – Staff hiring/supervising
    • family/two-career recruitments
  – Peer Review
  – Entrepreneurial activities
Conflict of Interest

• “...the mere existence of a Conflict of Interest does not necessarily imply wrongdoing on anyone’s part.” [Policy 97]
  – Must be recognized and disclosed
  – Must be managed appropriately
  – ‘Trust test’

• Conflict of interest should be disclosed to:
  – Funding agencies
  – Peer review committees, journal editors
  – Collaborators
  – University Departments
References


UBC Policy 97: Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy97.pdf

RCREC Internet Course, a product of the Responsible Conduct of Research Education Committee http://ethics.ucsd.edu/courses/rcrec_internet/about.html (©1992-2007)

http://www.armsdeal-vpo.co.za/special_items/reading/ethics.html