

Nurse Author & Editor

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Disclosures: What do they mean for Nurse Authors and Editors?

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In 2007 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) appointed a committee to tackle the thorny issue of conflicts of interest in medical research, education, and practice. The consensus report was released in April 2009 and is available on line as well as in print (<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/Conflict-of-Interest-in-Medical-Research-Education-and-Practice.aspx>). Because the focus of the IOM's work was on financial relationships between industry and physicians and researchers, some nurse authors, reviewers, and editors may not have considered the broader implications of the findings.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has addressed the need to disclose conflicts of interest in section D of the *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication* (2008). Section D is probably the information of most interest to nurse authors, reviewers and editors; however, the entire website of the ICMJE is worth exploring (<http://www.icmje.org/>). There is a wealth of information on ethical issues related to writing, reviewing, and publishing as well as useful checklists and forms.

For purposes of authorship, the ICMJE has standardized the disclosure form (*ICMJE Uniform Disclosure Form for Potential Conflicts of Interest*, 2009) that all authors can use to report financial and nonfinancial associations that might potentially create competing interests. This form is available as a modifiable PDF document at http://www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and can be modified by journals as needed to meet specific requirements. There is also a sample completed form that authors can examine to better understand the reporting requirements. An editorial published simultaneously in all ICMJE journals explains that the categories of disclosure include: associations and support for the work submitted; associations with commercial entities that are outside but might be considered to be related to the same general area as the submitted work; financial associations involving spouse, partner, or children under age 18; and finally, nonfinancial associations such as political, institutional, or religious affiliations that might influence the submitted work.

I've heard many complaints from authors, researchers, sponsors and academicians related to the extensive disclosure requirements for research and publication. I've also heard that nurses don't have the same problems that medicine does with regard to conflicts of interest. There has also been extended discussion of the appropriate terminology – should the term be conflicts of interest or competing interests? Regardless of what we call it, lawmakers, government agencies, and the public are concerned that financial rewards are exerting undue influence on healthcare decisions today (IOM, 2009). It is critical that scholars and researchers implement policies to reduce the risks of conflicts of interest and bias in the scholarly record. Nursing research and publication are not immune from the potential for competing interests.

Nursing specialties that report on and use specific pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and biotechnologies, such as primary and emergency care, wound care, or contraceptive care may be targets for “sponsored” articles written by professional medical writers with the support of industry. These practices are not forbidden or suspect as long as complete disclosure of all writing and editing support is disclosed and the disclosure is included with the articles when they are sent out for review. Reviewers should pay particular attention to sponsored articles to assure that the material presented is unbiased and the conclusions do not extend beyond the bounds of the evidence. The International Society of Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP; <http://ismpp.org/>) and the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA; <http://amwa.org/>) are two member organizations that promote ethical and responsible medical communication; both websites offer substantive information on this topic.

It is the responsibility of journal editors to review and manage any potential conflicts of interest and there are many ways to accomplish this. First, the author guidelines should contain a statement about the editorial policies related to disclosures and any editorial decisions related to conflicts or competing interests. If completion of the ICMJE disclosure statement is required, a link to that document should be provided in the guidelines or on the journal home page. There should be guidance to reviewers about what to do if they have a conflict of interest in reviewing an article on a particular topic; this should include notification of the editor as soon as possible and a mechanism for declining to do a review. Journals should publish disclosures of authors' potential conflicts of interest in a prominent location on all articles and maintain these records according to set policies. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has an excellent website with resources such as the *COPE Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors* (http://publicationethics.org/files/u2/Best_Practice.pdf) and flow charts addressing common ethical issues that arise in publishing.

There are many resources for nurse authors, reviewers and editors related to ethical publishing and we owe it to our readers and our profession to embrace best practices in writing, reviewing and editing. Proper disclosures are a significant part of those best practices.

References

Institute of Medicine. (2009). *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice*. Washington DC: The National Academies.

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