

ESICM - Task Force on Governance and Competing Interests

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Objectives of the policy and guidelines

- To define the basis for the declaration of competing interests for individuals performing activities on behalf of the ESICM, including speakers at conferences, members of council and executive committee as well as other official bodies. This would include a set of principles for personal governance (self regulation and ethical conduct).
- To propose regular monitoring and maintaining of such declarations.
- To develop actions that should be taken in the event of non-compliance.

Information concerning guidelines or standards concerning this topic, issued by other societies or professional bodies is considered.

Policies of organisations in health care (refs 2-5, 8)

The problem and procedure for disclosure of physician financial incentives is not limited to medical persons, but concerns all health care providers, partners and stakeholders in public and private organisations involved in health and medicine. A good review of the dimensions of the question is provided by Tracy E. Miller and William M. Sage in JAMA (281: 1424-30, 1999) touches on the multiple elements of the domain. Ethical, legal, financial and medial aspects are analyzed. Good understandings of these basic interrelations, their influence on trust between the different partners as well as on management choices, are essential. For instance, methods and ways to enforce disclosure, but also tradeoffs between ethical and legal frameworks are topics of general importance for all chapters related to financial incentives for physicians and scientists.

Relations between medical professionals and industry (refs 1, 6, 7)

Directives and regulations in this field give a good basis for the discussion concerning principles of disclosure to be proposed to the ESICM (see <http://www.emea.eu.int/> for Europe, or <http://www.fda.gov/> for the US).

One of the most recent and complete analysis of the question, including detailed proposition for practical application can be found on <http://samw.ch>: "Collaboration between medical professionals and the industry – Guidelines of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences".

Disclosing potential conflicts of interest and financial

An investigation of strategies to get a handle on these questions in different medical specialities and different countries has revealed enormous discrepancies. In general, the problems of transparency and disclosure in relevant professional and scientific contexts (e.g. prescribing and publications or presentations) are treated more openly and by more restrictive regulations in North America, Scandinavia and England when compared to most other countries. However, during the last few years, a clear evolution towards an increased awareness, more transparency and a more restrictive approach in personal financial incentives coming from industry can be observed in most European countries.

Guidelines, procedures and monitoring for disclosure in the ESICM

From the experience of other institutions it can be deduced that an important proportion of talented scientists invited to international meetings to present lectures have been offered financial support for research activities, travel and/or lecture fees by industry or other sponsors. It has however to be enforced that this must be transparent to anybody, and adequate procedures must become a routine.

From the point, the Task Force submits a framework for this disclosure, including

- activities, functions and positions requiring disclosure
- financial limits, e.g. minimal range requiring disclosure
- types of incentives (direct personal support, stocks, disclosure of involvement of family members, etc)
- procedure, e.g. form to be filled out for lecturers, standards for announcement of conflicts of interest and financial incentives to an audience
- periodicity of disclosures for officers in council, executive committee, etc.

The philosophy for such proposals must include clear ideas concerning feasibility (starting with a few elements, reasonable limits), and discussion about how to check indications given. For instance, advice from industry representatives for the latter point has provided helpful and can improve mutual understanding of potential problems.

Actions in the event of non-compliance: the catalogue of such actions in similar bodies includes deadlines given for fulfilling the requirements, temporary exclusion as speaker or committee member etc.

Guidelines for disclosure of competing interests

The following guidelines should promote transparency and disclosure of relevant information within the general ethical framework in this field.

The major purpose is not to discourage collaboration of healthcare professionals with industries and other instances, but to treat such information openly.

The following disclosures are mandatory for persons in official positions and functions in the ESICM (including Executive Committee, Council, Scientific Committee, Heads of Sections, Members of Task Forces and similar bodies) as well as for speakers and presenters at its official meetings:

- a) Financial incentives provided for personal support, including for consultant work, for travel expenses, congresses, etc by healthcare and other industry, above 2'000 Euros/year. If more than one donator contributes, the cumulative value is determinant, but all sources are disclosed.
- b) Support for research, clinical or in basic sciences by institutions such as mentioned in a), above 10'000 Euros /year. a) and b) must be indicated for the last 5 years.
- c) Financial interests in industries related to the health care market, as proprietor, partner, member of the board, or shareholder for a value above 10'000 Euros - of the person or a member of his family living in the same household.
- d) The ESICM holds a form on its website, to be filled in by all candidates for official positions before election and/or final nomination. A similar procedure is applied for invited speakers at the official meetings of the society. The completion of the form has to be revised regularly by persons holding official positions, every 2 years.
- e) The president of the ESICM or a person designated by the president and the executive committee acts as an Ombudsman for the analysis of these disclosures and suspicions of errors or omissions.
- f) The executive committee decides about sanctions in cases of non-compliance with these guidelines.

References

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