MEDICAL JOURNALS AND INDUSTRY TIES

Competing interests in epidemiology


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We congratulate \textit{The BMJ} for being among the first medical journals to implement a policy on declaring financial competing interests. The journal is a pioneer in recognising that transparency through such declarations is not a panacea but requires policy adjustments. The adjustments made relate specifically to articles commissioned by \textit{The BMJ} and apply to medical education articles that will, in future, be commissioned solely from authors without industry funding.\footnote{Chew M, Brizzell C, Abbasi K, Godlee F. Medical journals and industry ties. \textit{BMJ} 2014;349:g7197. (28 November.)}

Reducing the influence of financial competing interests in clinical education and practice guidelines is essential to promoting best practices that put public interest ahead of personal gain. It also protects the ability of scientific researchers and health practitioners to legitimately inform policy and the public on the basis of the best possible evidence. We look forward to learning of your experience after taking this bold step.

\textit{The BMJ}’s approach is relevant to applied research of the kind conducted by epidemiologists, where bias must also be vigilantly evaluated and mitigated. Indeed, the increased awareness of the adverse impacts of biased science through financial competing interests culminated in a compelling 2013 report on this matter by the Center for Public Integrity (\url{www.publicintegrity.org}).

Although work on ethics in epidemiology has been ongoing since the 1980s, the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE) and the International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (IJPC-SE) are now undertaking more intense deliberations and actions. The ISEE is focusing on the transparency dimension of the problem by developing stronger accountability criteria for declaring financial competing interests. The IJPC-SE is developing a broad based position statement on conflicts of interest and disclosure to be completed in 2015 (\url{www.ijpc-se.org/initiatives.php}). The IJPC-SE’s focus extends beyond company funding and affiliations.

We will pay particular attention to news on \textit{The BMJ}’s experience as we advance our own initiatives.

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