

Conflict of interest policy

Definition

Conflicts of interest (sometimes referred to as competing interests or dual loyalties) are common, some would say almost inevitable. Conflicts of interest are secondary interests (eg. personal, commercial, political, academic or financial) that may influence judgements on a primary decision, in this case what is published. They have been described as those which, when revealed later, would make a reasonable reader feel misled or deceived.

Financial interests may include employment, research funding, sponsorship, stock or share ownership, payment for lectures or travel, consultancies, company support for staff commissioning/funding/ sponsoring of any element of the paper, any financial or potential financial benefit, or PR firm involvement. This is not an exhaustive list of potential conflicts, rather an indication of the range of potential conflicts of interest.

Management of conflicts of interest

Australian Family Physician (AFP) takes the view that any potential conflicts of interest must be recognised and stated. If there is doubt about the existence of a conflict, it is preferable to err on the side of disclosure. Most conflicts of interest can be managed, as per the following procedures; however there may be occasions when the conflict of interest is so extreme as to make publication impossible.

Authors

Authors are asked to consider conflicts of interest in both the instructions to authors and then to declare in writing on a form.

- Instructions to authors – includes the following: 'Any potential conflicts of interest must be stated. Authors of research papers are required to disclose any sponsorship or funding arrangements relating to their research. If a commercial organisation has initiated or significantly contributed to the writing of the article, the organisation must be identified'.
- Conflict of interest form – requires authors to '...disclose any and all conflicts of interest, including direct, indirect, and potential conflicts of interest associated with the publication of the manuscript'. Authors are also specifically asked about involvement of pharmaceutical or other organisations or public relations firms, or potential financial benefits of publication. They are also asked, 'Are there any other personal, commercial, political, academic or financial arrangements or associations that readers of *Australian Family Physician* may perceive have a bearing on the writing or publication of this article? Yes / No If yes, what are they?' On this form authors are advised that if an unacceptable conflict of interest exists *AFP* reserves the right to decline publication.

Reviewers

Editors will attempt to select reviewers who have no conflict of interest with the manuscript (for example not selecting a reviewer who is known to work with the author). This process is not infallible. The information for reviewers asks reviewers to advise the editors if they feel they have a conflict of interest. In the case of a reviewer conflict of interest, if the reviewer feels unable to provide a review they will be removed from the reviewer list for that article. If the reviewer identifies a conflict, but feels able to provide a review, then the editor of the article will decide whether to stay with the original reviewer or to select a new reviewer.



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Editors

Editors will not act as the decision maker in articles with which they feel they have a conflict of interest, such as working with the authors or performing competing research. If the editor has not worked with the author for more than 6 months, then they may be eligible to edit an article. Some conflicts will be insurmountable for editors, for example personal friendships, which will not have a time expiry. Knowledge of an author or being an acquaintance is not enough on its own to mean that the editor can not manage the article. Editors should err on the side of not taking articles with which they may have a conflict of interest. Editors should discuss with other members of the editing team any concerns about their own conflicts, so a decision can be made about the most suitable editor for the article.

Editors may submit papers to the journal. In this case another editor would be appointed to manage the process. The article will be treated as usual for that category of article and undergo the same peer review process. If the article is accepted and published there will also be published a statement about the editorial process such as 'Editor A [author] is employed by the RACGP as [role] of *Australian Family Physician*. This manuscript was edited by [editor B who handled the manuscript].'

If no editor can be identified who does not have a conflict of interest then a guest editor may be invited to manage the manuscript. Any guest editor must have a good understanding of the journal.

Editorial Board Members

Articles by *AFP* Editorial Board members will be treated as usual for that category of article and undergo the same peer review process.

RACGP submissions

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is the publisher of *AFP*. Submissions by RACGP office holders, staff, committees or the like will be treated as usual for that category of article and undergo the same peer review process.

Supplements to *AFP*

Any *AFP* supplement articles will be treated as usual for that category of article and undergo the same peer review process. At the discretion of the Senior Medical Editor, a guest editor may be appointed to manage any supplement. Any sponsor of a supplement will not have any control over the content. The journal content is decided by the editor based on the peer review process of the journal.