HEART Group Notification Regarding “Management of Potential Conflict of Interest”

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The HEART Group (Heart Editors Action Round Table) consists of editors of cardiology journals in this country (and some from abroad). At a recent meeting, the following statement was accepted to be published in whole or in part in each of the participating journals. It is intended to emphasize the importance of declaring a potential conflict of interest.

MANAGING POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST DURING PUBLICATION AND PRESENTATION

“We live in an era of extensive industrial support and involvement in medical research. The National Institutes of Health undertakes cooperative endeavors in which industry provides substantial support in money or in kind, without which the research or clinical effort could not be undertaken. Industry additionally provides substantial non-governmental clinical and research support to individuals and medical institutions. The present state of health care in the United States is the result of the interaction between the profession, government and industry. During the most recent annual scientific sessions of major cardiologic societies, the large majority of participants declared a potential conflict of interest, a small number were employees of industry. Principal investigators receiving substantial support from industry may be the most expert in those fields which they are studying and developing and about which they will write research and review articles. An author-investigator uninvolved with industry may be less knowledgeable than one who is involved. Given these circumstances, the medical profession must be made aware of individual involvements that may influence interpretations reported in written or oral presentation.

Bias can exist related to strongly held scientific and medical opinion or financial considerations. Given these realities, the potential for conflict of interest based on influences other than scientific or medical is substantial and, as it may be unavoidable, must be declared. Such declaration must not be construed as an implication of impropriety that prejudices the author or program participant. The disclosure(s) should include potential conflict of interest relationships of the author or those close to him or her either in family or institution, relative to any organization whose products or services are being discussed or affected by the oral or written presentation.

Financial relationship is defined by ownership of patent, equity, options or obligations, or receipt of goods, services, or cash within the past two years. Research support should always be declared whether from a non-profit or governmental agency or from a for-profit organization. Revenue received as part of a multicenter trial in which the investigator has no role other than relating to his/her patients, and if less than 1% of the total trial expenditure and consumption of comestibles and receipt of disposables, need not be declared.

Declaration of potential conflict of interest related to the topic discussed should be part of each publication or presentation and be designated as one or more of four categories:

1. No relationship;
2. Relationship with a for-profit organization as defined above;
3. Research relationship with a for-profit or not-for-profit organization, which should be named;
4. Employee of a for-profit or not-for-profit organization.

Failing an author’s acknowledgement and appropriate designation of the potential conflict of interest, it will be the prerogative of the journal editor or program organizer to designate the drug, device or service about which conflict may exist. The potential conflict will be listed within the author listing for all four categories for all authors. Identification of affiliation of all authors, as at present, will be included as well as sources of funding.”

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