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## Disclose and Manage

### *Recommendations From the AACI Conflict of Interest Task Force*

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## Commentary Overview

- AACI convened a Conflict of Interest (COI) Task Force to help standardize cancer center policies and formulate basic recommendations for best practices.
- “Disclose and manage” should be a guiding principle in conflict of interest oversight.
- When reporting scientific findings, transparency is critical to assuring patients that cancer centers and physicians are always acting in their best interest.
- Task force recommendations include disclosing all affiliations with foreign institutions and laboratories and extending disclosures to immediate family members.

**Last September, the *New York Times* reported that a major cancer center executive had violated financial conflicts of interest policies due to connections to drug and health care companies. Later that month, the same cancer center was reported to have a stake in an artificial intelligence startup and to have utilized patient samples from the center. In April 2019, another cancer center terminated three scientists after receiving notification from the National Institutes of Health regarding concerns about foreign theft of intellectual property at academic institutions.**

In response to mounting concerns about the relationship between academic medicine and private industry as well as foreign entities, AACI convened a Conflict of Interest (COI) Task Force to help standardize COI policies at AACI's member cancer centers. The diverse group included five cancer center directors, a leader of early phase clinical trials development, and a patient advocate, who reviewed the policies submitted by 38 of AACI's 98 cancer centers.

It was determined that COI policies are ultimately the domain of each academic institution, often guided by a cancer center's parent institution. In fact, of the cancer centers responding to AACI's request for information, 86 percent indicated that they followed the same COI policies as their parent institutions. The task force heard concerns that individual centers may not be able to endorse AACI's recommendations because they are bound to institutional policies that are unlikely to change.

The task force discovered a broad range of approaches to COI. Some center directors review potential conflicts; others don't. One center has a process for disclosure on an annual basis, with the requirement that any changes be reported within 30 days and reviewed on a case-by-case basis by an institution-wide committee. Another center oversees faculty, but its mandate is difficult to enforce—and who is doing the enforcing is sometimes unclear.

When reporting scientific findings, cancer center transparency—including disclosure of financial relationships—is critical to assuring patients that cancer centers and physicians are always acting in their best interest. Given that academia has a major stake in drug development, there will inevitably be some conflicts of interest since scientists make new discoveries that ultimately benefit patients. Therefore, AACI believes that “disclose and manage” should be a guiding principle in conflict of interest oversight.

## Best Practices for Ensuring Disclosures

AACI's COI Task Force formulated basic [recommendations](#) for best practices to ensure that all conflicts are fully disclosed.

To avoid a potential conflict, the task force recommends that cancer center leadership, such as the cancer center director, review and approve all disclosures for faculty and staff under their purview.

The task force further recommends that cancer center leadership, faculty, and staff disclose all COI, including public speaking engagements, webinars, and other educational activities, even if the educational event is not an accredited continuing medical education course. In addition, the task force calls for disclosure of all dollar amounts related to such activities when applicable and regardless of an artificial money limit.

Other key task force recommendations include disclosing all affiliations with foreign institutions and laboratories, financial or otherwise, and extending disclosures to at least immediate family members, including spouses, children, parents, and siblings.

## Trust: the Foundation of Groundbreaking Research

Transparency in disclosure of potential conflicts is essential to building and maintaining patient trust. This trust fosters positive physician-patient relationships, ultimately supporting AACI's mission of reducing the burden of cancer. The task force established basic guidelines to guarantee that conflicts are disclosed and managed so that groundbreaking research and drug development continue to flourish at academic cancer centers.

***AACI welcomes feedback on these recommendations.*** Comments will be incorporated into a formal presentation of the task force's recommendations and panel discussion on Monday, October 21, during the [AACI/CCAF Annual Meeting](#) in Washington, DC.

[Read the COI Recommendations](#)

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## Our Mission

Representing 98 of North America's premier academic and freestanding cancer centers, the Association of American Cancer Institutes is dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer by enhancing the impact of leading cancer centers.

## About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes Commentary, an editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.



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