



Conflict of Interest (COI) Task Force Recommendations

July 8, 2019

Background

In response to recent conflict of interest concerns in the cancer community and subsequent media inquiries, the Association of American Cancer Institutes' (AACI) Board of Directors has established a task force to draft recommendations on standards and policies for conflict of interest disclosure at AACI's member cancer centers. When reporting scientific findings, cancer center transparency, including disclosure of financial relationships, is critical to maintaining patients' trust, assuring them that cancer centers and physicians are always acting in their best interest. To formulate recommendations, the task force collected information on current conflict of interest policies, including summaries of disclosure requirements, at 38 of AACI's 98 member centers.

Recommendations

Given that academia has a major stake in drug development, the AACI COI task force recognizes that there will inevitably be 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.

Policies around conflict of interest are ultimately the domain of each academic institution. In many cases, these policies are provided and guided by a cancer center's parent institution. Utilizing information gathered through the review of existing conflict of interest policies at AACI's member cancer centers, AACI formulated basic recommendations for best practices in ensuring that all conflicts are disclosed with the utmost transparency.

To avoid 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 should:

1. Disclose conflicts of interest at all times, including but not limited to public speaking engagements, webinars, and other educational activities, whether the educational event is CME-accredited or not.
2. Disclose all dollar amounts when applicable and regardless of an artificial money limit (i.e., more than \$10,000).
3. Disclose all affiliations with foreign institutions and laboratories, financial or otherwise.



4. The task force recommends that disclosures extend to at least immediate family members (i.e., spouse, child, parent, sibling).

Conclusion

Establishing trust is of the utmost importance in the physician-patient relationship, and that trust is pertinent to allowing cancer centers to accomplish the overall mission of reducing the burden of cancer. Practicing transparency in disclosure of relationships which might cause conflict is key to developing and maintaining patient trust. It is the task force's hope that basic guidelines will help to ensure that conflicts are disclosed and managed to allow for groundbreaking research and drug development at academic cancer centers to flourish.