A Common Standard for COI Disclosures in Scientific Journals: An Associate Editor’s Perspective

Thomas F. Babor, Ph.D., MPH
University of Connecticut
School of Medicine
Cumulative Number of Addiction Journals Published Since 1884

- Total
- English
- Non-English

Publishing Addiction Science
Options for Managing COI’s in Scientific Publishing

- Prohibition of industry support for research
- Partial prohibition:
  - Some industries (e.g., tobacco, but not others (e.g., pharmaceuticals)
  - Some forms (e.g., direct) but not others (e.g., indirect)
- Management: oversight by an independent Research Management Board
- Disclosure: A common standard?
Purposes of Disclosure

• To inform: editors, reviewers, readers, the public
• To provide documentation of potential for bias that can be detected after monitoring the cumulative scientific record
• To symbolize a potential threat to the integrity of science and the need for increased vigilance
Reasons for non-disclosure

- Ignorance
- Lack of a common standard and uniform reporting procedures
- Deceptive authors
- Deceptive funding sources
Industry-supported Social Aspect Organizations:

• A growing role in research and public policy
• Support youth prevention activities
• Support scientific research
• Promote road safety and crime reduction
Social Aspect Organizations Funded by Alcohol Industry

Worldwide Brewing Alliance: Global social responsibility initiatives
British Beer & Pub Association, 2003
Actual Role of Social Aspect Organizations

• Public relations
• Lobbying for industry-favorable policies
• Neutralize opposing views and criticism
• Promote industry-favored scientists
• Oppose unpopular but effective policies
• Support ineffective but popular policies
Sponsorship of Independent Research Funding Organizations

- European Research Advisory Board (ERAB),
- Alcoholic Beverage Medical Research Foundation (ABMRF),
- Institut de Recherches Scientifiques sur les Boissons (IREB).
- Risks: Little research is actually done; research agenda is partially controlled; advisory panels support senior researchers travel; young investigators are not informed of risks to career
Direct support provided to university-based scientists

• the Portman Group supported the positions of several researchers.

• Diageo gave 1.5 million euros to University College Dublin to study the “drivers” of binge drinking. CEO Paul Walsh was quoted as saying the funding was intended to avoid taxation and regulation.
Research Conducted by Trade Organizations and SAPROs

• The International Center for Alcohol Policy (ICAP) has engaged in empirical studies and has published its findings in scientific journals.
Efforts to influence public perceptions of research

• Distilled Spirits Council of United States supports letters to the editor questioning the methodology of an NIH study concluding that alcohol advertising is associated with increased alcohol use by youth

• COI statement said “Funded by the Distilled Spirits Council.”
Examples of Deceptive Acknowledgements from Funding Sources

• Edited book on studies showing nicotine is not addictive
• International Life Sciences publication of an edited book on health effects of alcohol that was funded by alcohol producers through the Amsterdam Group
• The International Center for Alcohol Policy funded a survey published in a peer reviewed journal (Houghton, 1998) showing that alcohol industry support was increasing the amount of prevention activity around the world. The author did not disclose that the survey was funded indirectly by 11 major alcohol producers
What do we need to know from disclosure statements?

- Who is paying for the science?
- What is the purpose of the funding?
- How much is being paid?
- Does the funding impose limitations on the research agenda, the scientist’s freedom to publish the results, prior review of results, etc.?
- Will the funding and research findings be used by industry sources for public relations purposes?
Beyond Disclosure: What else can be done to protect scientific integrity?

- Central registration of COI statements
- More research on research bias, misuse of scientific findings, industry influence on public policy
- Partial prohibition of funding arrangements with
- Ethical analysis of major COI funding streams