Conflict of interest policy for Editors of The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition¹,²

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Integrity in the publication process requires impartiality at all levels of review. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (AJCN) adheres to the policy of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publications (1). This policy details the ethical considerations relevant to ensuring impartiality. Consistent with this policy, the AJCN’s Information for Authors requires authors to disclose “any advisory board affiliations with and financial or personal interests in any organization sponsoring the research at the time the research was done.” Similarly consistent with the policy, the AJCN expects reviewers to recuse themselves from refereeing manuscripts in those circumstances in which a significant conflict of interest exists at either the financial or personal level. Furthermore, if a reviewer has knowledge of any relationship that might possibly constitute a conflict of interest when asked to evaluate a manuscript, it is the reviewer’s obligation to notify the editors, who will then decide whether to exclude the reviewer in that particular instance. Remarkably, there are few established, explicit conflict of interest policies for journal editors, although such an explicit policy was published recently by the Journal of Clinical Investigation (2) and is discussed further therein (3). The policy of the ICMJE (1) requires that editors “who make final decisions about manuscripts must have no personal, professional, or financial involvement in any of the issues they might judge.” Below, with acknowledgment to the editors of the Journal of Clinical Investigation for providing the framework (2), we, the new editors of the AJCN, provide our specific implementation of the ICMJE policy as it applies to our stewardship of the AJCN.

FINANCIAL CONFLICTS

AJCN Editors will declare, on the AJCN website (www.ajcn.org), all relationships from which they (and his or her spouse or dependent children) receive either assets or supplemental income of greater than $1000 per annum outside of compensation related to his or her full-time, permanent employment. In this context, a “relationship” is defined as 1) ownership of equity in any public or private company in the agriculture, food, nutrition, and pharmaceutical industries, but excluding holdings in mutual funds; 2) participation in any industry related activity, agreement or arrangement that results in a financial payment of transfer of assets to the editor exceeding actual expenses for travel and participation; and 3) actual or in kind research support for the editor’s research activities. The initial website declaration will appear on 1 July 2007 and will include all potential conflicts that exist at that time. The website declaration will be updated yearly on July 1 to include the potential conflicts that have occurred in the intervening year. The initial conflict of interest declaration for new editors will be published on AJCN’s website when the editor assumes his or her duties and will be updated each year on July 1 thereafter.

OTHER CONFLICTS

Editors will recuse themselves from being responsible for manuscripts submitted by associates (former students, fellows, mentors, and collaborators) with whom they have worked over the previous 5 y and by faculty members at their own institutions. Manuscripts submitted to the AJCN by one of the editors will be handled by another editor. The AJCN’s electronic submission and review software allows the Associate Editor to deny the conflicted editor access to any information concerning manuscripts submitted by associates or by the individual editor. Additionally, the conflicted editor will be prohibited from participating in any discussion among the editors pertaining to such manuscripts.

In addition, the editors realize that it is not possible to define or anticipate every potential conflict. Thus, when new apparent conflicts arise, they will be evaluated individually by the Editor-in-Chief and by those Associate Editors who are not affected by the conflict. The affected editor agrees to abide by the decision of his or her colleagues in this instance. Finally, we should point out that conflict of interest policies are changing rapidly and that both

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the AJCN and the American Society for Nutrition will be reviewing and revising their overall conflict of interest policies this year. The AJCN Editors’ conflict of interest policy represents the first of several steps that are meant to keep nutrition research free of conflict of interest to the fullest extent possible.

None of the authors had any personal or financial conflicts of interest relevant to the conflict of interest policy expressed in this editorial.

REFERENCES