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Conflict of Interest in research

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Summary

A conflict of interest arises when one's judgment is compromised based on connections, favors, or competing interests, and/or when one's position is used to gain favor or extra rewards. Conflicts of interest are not always immediately obvious, nor does a conflict of interest in-and-of-itself constitute wrongdoing. Personal obligations, connections to other institutions, participation in other research programs, or drawing from competing pools of funding can influence one's capacity to be impartial in a given situation. Being impartial is as necessary in producing and reviewing scientific research as it is in jury selection in a court of law or in the practice of medicine. Perfect impartiality is not really possible, as we are always assessing a situation based on the unique culmination of our experiences and perspectives. Nevertheless, there are experiences, perspectives, and connections that may cause us to not be able to think outside of our own interests. Knowing when we are or are not able to think outside of our other interests is crucial to understanding how to avoid possible conflicts of interest. It is important to note that having an opposing viewpoint does not constitute a conflict of interest and is a cornerstone to robust reviews.

Meaning of Interest

An interest may be defined as a commitment, goal, or value held by an individual or an institution. Examples include a research project to be completed, gaining status through promotion or recognition, and protecting the environment. Interests are pursued in the setting of social interactions.

Conflict of Interest (COI) -

A conflict of interest exists when two or more contradictory interests relate to an activity by an individual or an institution. The conflict lies in the situation, not in any behavior or lack of behavior of the individual. That means that a conflict of interest is not intrinsically a bad thing.

Examples include a conflict between financial gain and meticulous completion and reporting of a research study or between responsibilities as an investigator and as a treating physician for the same trial participant.

Conflicts of interest are "situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, an investigator's judgment in conducting or reporting research." - AAMC, 1990

"A conflict of interest in research exists when the individual has interests in the outcome of the research that may lead to a personal advantage and that might therefore, in actuality or appearance compromise the integrity of the research."

-NAS, Integrity in Scientific Research

A. The Research Community-

1. Free and independent research:

Researchers shall enjoy individual freedom and have real independence. Institutional self- regulation shall be ethically responsible and cannot violate the norms of good scientific practice.

2. Obligations of the research community:

Researchers shall contribute to building academic communities characterized by openness, factuality, and collegiality.

3. Academic assessment

Researchers must be open about roles and interests in relation to academic assessments .Research institutions must safeguard openness and deliberation about roles and interests.

4. Supervisors and project leaders

Supervisors and project leaders have a general and comprehensive responsibility for research ethics in projects conducted under their purview.

5. The supervisory relationship

Supervisors and students/PhD candidates must treat each other with respect. Supervisors should not misuse their position to their own advantage. This applies in both academic and personal matters.

6. Openness, accountability, and critique

Research material and results should be made available to others as openly as possible to facilitate learning, accountability, and critique.

7. Scientific publication

Scientific publication and other modes of publication are important both to ensure the quality of the research and to protect fundamental norms regarding originality, accountability, and critique. Researchers must avoid duplication – reuse or redundant publication of the same result without providing the appropriate references

8. Good citation practice

All research should follow good citation practice. Recognition of the work of others is important to maintain a collegial culture and it is a precondition for accountability and critique.

9. Co-authorship

Researchers shall respect the contributions of others and comply with recognised norms of co-authorship and collaboration.

10. Plagiarism

Stealing someone else's work and presenting it as one's own is incompatible with good scientific practice. You should always make it clear in your written work where you've borrowed from others. This applies to all sources, whether they're published or unpublished, and whether they're in print or on the internet.

11. Fabrication and falsification

Fabricating or forging research material or results is incompatible with good scientific practice. Fabrication is "making up data or results." Falsification is "manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record."

12. Distortion and concealment

Distorting or concealing relevant interpretations or analyses is incompatible with good scientific practice.

13. Safety and security

Researchers are responsible for continuously assessing their own safety and the safety of others. Research institutions should have routines for handling risk and security.

14. International collaboration

Researchers at institutions must comply with rules and guidelines when conducting research in other countries.

B) Research Participants

15. Consent to participate in research

As a main rule, researchers are ethically obliged to obtain consent from the research participants. Ethical consent to participate should be voluntary, informed, and unambiguous, and it is preferably documentable.

16. Impaired capacity to consent

When research participant's capacity to provide consent is impaired or absent, researchers have a particular responsibility to safeguard their freedoms, rights, and human dignity.

17. Protection of children

Children who participate in research have a particular right to protection. As a main rule, researchers must obtain consent both from the parents and from the children themselves. In some cases, children may consent on their own.

18. Exceptions from the demand for consent

In some situations, including persons in research even though ethical consent is not obtained may be responsible. Researchers are nonetheless responsible for providing information.

19. Transparency about roles and responsibilities:

Researchers are responsible for clarifying to the participants the boundaries, expectations, and requirements associated with the role of a researcher.

20. Anonymity:

Researchers must ensure that anonymity is protected when it has been agreed upon or otherwise is prudent.

21. Confidentiality:

Researchers shall handle the data confidentially when it has been agreed upon or otherwise is prudent. If researchers plan to use data collected by others on the condition of confidentiality, they must ensure that permission to depart from this condition has been secured.

22. Duty of notification:

Researchers have a duty to notify when the participants are endangering themselves or others. In certain situations, researchers must depart from the demand for confidentiality to safeguard the duty to notify.

23. Privacy and family life:

Researchers should respect privacy and family life.

24. Storage and sharing of research material:

Research data and other research material should be stored and shared responsibly.

25. Reporting the results:

Researchers shall report the results to the participants in a clear and responsible way.

26. Direct and indirect involvement:

Researchers have a responsibility towards persons who are directly or indirectly affected by the research.

27. Values and motives:

Researchers should respect different values and attitudes.

28. Risk of harm and disadvantage

29. Posthumous legacy

Researchers should respect the legacy of deceased people.

30. Future generations

Researchers have a responsibility towards future generations.

C) Groups and Institutions

31. Disadvantaged and vulnerable groups:

Researchers have a special responsibility to protect the integrity and interests of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

32. Respect for cultural differences:

In research on culturally defined groups, gaining knowledge about and respect the local context and social relations is important.

33. Cultural heritage:

Knowledge of the past is important to the present and the future. Institutions and researchers shall treat all types of cultural heritage responsibly.

34. Public administration:

Public offices should enable independent research on their activities and data.

35. Private companies and organisations:

Private companies and organisations should provide for research on their activities and data.

D) Commisioners, Funders, and Collaborators-

36. Independence in research:

All research actors must protect the independence of the researchers against pressure and control.

37. The responsibility of the research institutions:

Research institutions must ensure that all research is conducted in accordance with recognized norms of research ethics. This is particularly important when such norms are under pressure.

38. Commissioners and funders:

Commissioners and funders are jointly responsible for ensuring that their participation in research is in accordance with recognized norms of research ethics. Strategic adaptation of projects to bypass ethical norms should not occur.

39. Collaborative projects:

40. User involvement:

Research ethics must be ensured in all modes of user involvement.

41. Transparency about funding, roles, and interests:

All research actors are responsible for securing transparency about funding and interests.

42. Use of research results

43. The right to publication and public presentation:

All research actors have a responsibility to promote open research in scientific publications and other modes of public presentation.

44. Publication ethics

45. Dissemination as a social responsibility:

Researchers have a social responsibility to disseminate research.

46. Dissemination as an institutional responsibility:

Research institutions should facilitate dissemination of research and other forms of dialogue and interaction.

47. Dissemination and accountability:

The demand for accountability in dissemination is the same as in research.

48. Dissemination and factuality:

The demand for factuality is the same in dissemination as in scientific publication.

49. Participation in interdisciplinary dialogue:

Researchers should communicate across specialised academic fields.

50. Participation in public debate:

Researchers shall bring scientific results, methods, and attitudes into the public discourse.

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