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QUICK TIPS

Identification and Management of Conflicts of Interest and Transparency to Learners

For presenters and planning committee members
of Mainpro+® certified programs and events

September 2019

Defining Conflict of Interest

What is conflict of interest?

Conflict of interest: A set of conditions in which judgement or decisions concerning a primary interest (e.g., a patient's welfare, the validity of research, and/or quality of medical education) is unduly influenced by a secondary interest (personal or organizational benefit including financial gain, academic or career advancement, or other benefits to family, friends, or colleagues).

Perceived conflict of interest: An appearance of a conflict of interest as judged by outside observers regardless of whether an actual conflict of interest exists.

Real conflict of interest: When two or more interests are indisputably in conflict. An identified real conflict of interest always requires a bias mitigation strategy.

Why is it important?

Conflict of interest exists when an individual—whether a member of a planning committee or a presenter—has an opportunity to influence the content of an educational event through the mention or promotion of products, services, or therapies of a financial interest with which they have a relationship, or through the omission of mentioning competing products or services.

The purpose of identifying and addressing potential conflicts of interest is to ensure proper balance, independence, objectivity, and scientific rigor for educational activities.

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) does not view the existence of a financial relationship itself as necessarily implying bias or decreasing the value of an individual's participation in a continuing professional development (CPD) activity. However, when actual or perceived conflicts of interest are identified, organizers and presenters must ensure that they are appropriately addressed.

Disclosing Conflict of Interest

Who should disclose conflicts of interest?

Anyone in a position to control the content of a CPD activity should disclose any and all potential conflicts of interest and resolve them prior to the CPD activity. The CFPC requires all members of scientific planning committees, speakers, moderators, facilitators, and authors to complete the CFPC Mainpro+® Conflict of Interest Form.

What should be disclosed?

Examples of potential conflicts of interest include the following:

- Any direct financial payments including receipt of honoraria
- Membership on advisory boards or speakers' bureaus
- Funded grants or clinical trials
- Patents on a drug, product, or device
- All other investments or relationships that could be seen by a reasonable, well-informed participant as having the potential to influence the educational activity content

These examples apply to relationships with both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

Organizers of CPD activities can prevent or reduce the risk of conflict of interest by selecting scientific planning committee members, speakers, moderators, facilitators, and authors who do not have relationships to organizations related to the content. They may also assign aspects of the content that do not place the speaker/author/facilitator in a potential conflict of interest.

Conflict of Interest Identified

Once a conflict of interested is identified, the scientific planning committee must determine if the conflict of interest can be practically managed. If it cannot, the committee will need to select another presenter.

What if a scientific planning committee member declares a potential conflict of interest?

As above, the chair of the scientific planning committee must determine if the conflict of interest can be practically managed. The chair may determine that the member with the conflict must refrain from participating in decision making for program elements connected to the conflict. If the conflict cannot be practically managed, the member with the conflict may be asked to step down from the committee. The management strategy specific to the planning committee as well as presenters must be clearly described on the application for Mainpro+ certification and disclosed to learners using the mitigation of bias slide (described below).

Resolution mechanisms

Appropriate mechanisms for resolution can include altering control over content or independent content validation.

Altering control over content

- Choose someone else to present the problematic part of the content
- Change the focus of the CPD activity so the content is not about the supporting organization's products or services, if that is the basis of the conflict of interest
- Ask the presenter to avoid making personal recommendations and to limit their presentation to a discussion of the evidence; another presenter can be assigned to address broader implications and recommendations
- Limit the presenter's role to reporting recommendations based on formal structured reviews of the literature, along with a clear statement of the inclusion and exclusion criteria; that is, present information that is explicitly evidence-based rather than personal recommendations or selecting the evidence to be presented

Independent content validation

Conflict of interest may be resolved if the CPD material is peer reviewed. Scientific planning committees may review the content/presentation in question to ensure that:

- All recommendations involving clinical medicine are based on evidence that is accepted within the profession
- All scientific research referred to, reported, or used in the CPD activity in support or justification of patient care recommendations conforms to the generally accepted standards

Determining the right course of action can be facilitated by asking a few useful questions, such as:

- How were the topics and the presenter determined?
- What content is expected to be included in the presentation?
- Will the presenter be making clinical recommendations?
- What sources of evidence will support the presentation?

Other considerations for bias mitigation strategies

- For activities that occur more than once it is important to continually review evaluation feedback for bias identified by participants
- Speakers who have been identified as biased should not be invited to speak again
- Program providers may choose to audit sessions where conflict of interest has been identified to ensure proper disclosure practices are followed

Organizers of CPD activities should maintain documentation of the resolution of conflict of interest in their files.

Transparency to Learners

CPD event organizers and presenters must take steps that allow participants to make independent judgments about the relationships identified and management strategies employed to deal with any conflicts of interest.

For Mainpro+ certified programs, the CFPC requires additional slides/steps with specific disclosure information about potential conflicts of interest. Scientific planning committees must take ownership of the content of these conflict of interest disclosure slides/steps to the same extent they do for the content of the rest of educational program.

At the start of each live activity certified by the CFPC, program facilitators/chairs must present the three-slide/step conflict of interest declaration.

Slide 1/Step 1—Faculty/Presenter Disclosure: Personal relationships with for-profit and not-for-profit interests (one slide per faculty member/presenter).

Slide 2/Step 2—Program Disclosure of Financial Support: Specific outline of connections/support for the program development/presentation from external entities or organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit) including educational grants, in-kind services (e.g., logistics) AND specific aspects of the faculty/presenter connections that a reasonable program participant might consider relevant to the presentation, (e.g., products made by companies named in slide 1 that could be relevant to the presentation). This slide should be completed and (when possible) presented by the scientific planning committee.

Slide 3/Step 3—Mitigation of Bias (required only if conflicts are identified in slides/steps 1 and 2): Description of measures taken by the scientific planning committee to deal with and mitigate potential sources of bias in the presentation.

For live activities, these slides/steps are to be visually and verbally presented to the audience. Sufficient time must be allowed for the audience to read and comprehend the information being shared. There must be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions about the disclosure should they arise.

Templates provided by the CFPC must be used (see below); however, colours and slide themes may be modified to match that of the program.

- Examples are shown below; the bold text within brackets must be modified by the scientific planning committee or course director as per the program
- Where a faculty/presenter has no relationships to disclose, indicate **Not Applicable** under Relationships with Financial Sponsors on Slide/Step 1
- Where a program has received no external financial support (e.g., monies for food, logistics assistance such as registration, AV set-up, etc.), indicate **No External Support** on Slide/Step 2
- Where there are no potential biases identified in slides/steps 1 and 2, indicate **Not Applicable** on Slide/Step 3.
- When a speaker/facilitator has no relationships that might pose a potential conflict of interest and the program has been developed without external support, Slide/Step 3 may be omitted
- Scientific planning committees must review and approve the content of slides/steps 1 and 2 for each speaker/facilitator associated with the program; where potential for conflicts exist, the committee must discuss and approve the management plan outlined on Slide/Step 3

Clarifications for multi-speaker conferences and online activities

- For large events with multiple sessions and speakers, information about financial support of the entire program must be presented only once at the beginning of the conference, as well as in written program materials (website and/or printed program). Individual speakers need only present information about their own relationships, or lack thereof.

- If a CPD activity is delivered without using presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezzi) or other presentation aids, declaration information must be provided verbally (for live events) and in print (e.g., printed program, online module, program website). Declarations must be easily accessible to participants and follow a format similar to the three-slide/step disclosure.

Slide ❶   FACULTY PRESENTER DISCLOSURE

Faculty/speaker's name:

Relationships with financial sponsors:

- Any direct financial relationships, including receipt of honoraria: **PharmaCorp ABC**, **Canadian Cancer Org.**
- Membership on advisory boards or speakers' bureaus: **XYZ Biopharmaceuticals Ltd**.
- Patents for drugs or devices: **Widget ABC**
- All other investments or relationships that could be seen by a reasonable, well-informed participant as having the potential to influence the content of the educational

Slide ❷   DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This program has received financial support from [**organization name**] in the form of [**describe support here—e.g., an educational grant**].

This program has received in-kind support from [**organization name**] in the form of [**describe support here—e.g., logistical support**].

Potential for conflict(s) of interest:

- [**Speaker/Faculty name**] has received [**payment/funding, etc.**] from [**organization supporting this program and/or organization whose product(s) are being discussed in this program [do not list the products**].
- [**Supporting organization name**] [**developed/licenses/distributes/ benefits from the sale of, etc.**] a product [do not name the product] that will be discussed in this program.

Slide ❸ MITIGATING POTENTIAL BIAS

[**Explain how potential sources of bias identified in slides 1 and 2 have been mitigated**]

» Refer to "Quick Tips" document