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Aim: The aim of this commentary is to discuss conflicts of interest and their impact on health care practice, policy and science. Methods: The discussion is based on a selective literature review and my own empirical studies. Results and conclusions: There is growing pressure on medical practitioners, researchers and policy makers to face up to the subject of conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are often unavoidable. There is nothing automatically dishonourable about this and it does not in itself either detract from the value of the research and clinical work being done or impugn the integrity of the people https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407079717ng it. However, the issue becomes critical when possible conflicts of interest are ignored. Inadequate awareness and transparency may cause substantial damage, both to the quality of research and clinical practice, and also to the reputations of individuals and of the medical profession and the scientific community as a whole. Therefore, to deal constructively with conflicts of interest we particularly need to enhance the awareness and transparency.