**Declarations of conflict of interest are still inadequate**

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400 words (+ one table)

Our own Conflict of Interest statement: None of the authors has any financial COI with respect to the content of this article. None of the authors is a member of an organization with opinions on the issues dealt with in the manuscript.

No external funding. The manuscript was written by the authors. No writing agency was involved. The corresponding author (Lars Breimer) had full access to all the data and final responsibility to submit though this was, of course, a joint decision.

Declaration of conflict of interest (COI, understood mainly as financial) in medical publications is long established. Most journals refer only to the guidelines of International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) but not those of the WAME (World Association of Medical Editors). We surveyed 17 journals (Table) and found only 1 (BJOG) which explicitly gave “religious interest” as an example of a possible COI and 1 other journal had “personal belief” (Journal of Obstericts and Gynaecology of India). Yet ICMJE COI guidelines fail to require COI of involvement in religious and/or secular groups which take sides in the subject being discussed while the WAME specifically do. Instead the ICMJE uses the vaguer phrase “intellectual beliefs”. The actual ICJME COI-form does not itemize religion. To maintain their scientific credibility, medical journals must start requiring disclosure of such ties. A typical example where current ICMJE rules fall short is the ongoing heated debates over the ethics of prenatology and of physician assisted suicide.

As physicians and scientists, we are concerned about this failure. Political and religious groups not infrequently try to exert influence by encouraging prestigious scientists, preferably with an impressive title like Professor, to act as mouthpieces and decoys for their agenda. It is unacceptable that experts in ethics sometimes fail to acknowledge their personal beliefs. It has long been considered self-evident that those commenting on public issues must declare their political allegiance. Likewise, especially in debating sensitive and contentious medical areas where advances in research are making hitherto undreamt of interventions possible, full disclosure is not just desirable but a *sine qua non*.

That sailing under false flags (or none at all) seems standard on various Internet websites is regrettable but beyond the control of the medical profession. However, we contend that Medical Journals must become vigilant in ensuring that *all* relevant conflicts of interest are clearly, thoroughly, and unequivocally declared. As an example, a tentative amended version of a COI applied to our present communication could be formulated thus: “None of the authors has any financial COI with respect to the content of this article. None of the authors is a member of a political party or religious or secular organizations and action groups with opinions on the issues dealt with in the article.” Reviewers should follow the same COI requirements. Practically having a "button", forced to be clicked, as part of the submission mechanism may be the simplest.

400 words

Table 1. Journals surveyed for COI text in their Instructions to Authors

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Journal** | **COI model** | **Religion itemized in the Instruction to Authors text describing various examples of COI** | **Comment** |
| NEJM | ICJME | No | General journal |
| JAMA | ICJME | No |
| Lancet | ICJME | No |
| BMJ | ICJME | No |
| JIM | ICJME | No |
| Br J Haematol | ICJME | No | Haematology |
| Blood | ASH’s own | No |
| Pediatrics | ICJME | No | Paediatrics incl neonatology |
| J Pediatrics | ICJME but mentions WAME | No |
| Acta Paediatrica | Not specified; mentions COPE | No |
| AJOG | ICJME | No | Obstetrics and gynaecology |
| EJOG | Not specified | No |
| JOG | Not specified | No |
| BJOG | ICJME | Yes— “religious interest” |
| JOG of India | Not specified | Partly – ”personal beliefs” |
| Indian Obs Gyn | Not specified | No |
| IJOG | ICJME | No |