

Integrity in Publishing: Update on Policies and Statements on Authorship, Duplicate Publications, and Conflict of Interest

Scientific writing and publishing is built on a foundation of integrity and public trust. Trust in published clinical research findings is in turn based on well-designed clinical trials, accurate and objective analysis of the data, and unbiased interpretation of the findings and implications. Concerns have been expressed in various journals about the potential and real influences of industry (e.g., pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers), continuing medical education organizations underwritten by industry, commercial media groups, and other commercial entities on publications related to medical science and the practice of medicine.¹⁻⁴ If researchers, clinicians, and educators are to publish their findings and opinions, then the public should be able to assume that there is unbiased reporting and that the authors have no real or potential competing interests (conflict of interest; COI) that may influence what they write. Research has documented that there is a strong association between those studies whose authors had a COI and reporting of positive findings for drugs or products being described.⁵ Moreover, as recently as 10 years ago, only 16% of 1,396 highly ranked scientific and biomedical journals had COI policies, and fewer than 1% of the published articles with COI policies contained any financial disclosures from the authors.⁶ A recent *Wall Street Journal* article reported that a highly reputable medical journal failed to adequately disclose the relationship the authors had with a company manufacturing a device that they were supporting in their "Perspective" article.⁷ This incident served to further underscore the necessity for all journals, especially those focused in medical and health care, to reexamine their own policies regarding medical writing in general (authorships, ghost writing, duplicate publication) and COI policies and statements.^{8,9} To that end, the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (JAGS) editors and editorial board members reviewed our current policies and statements regarding the issues of authorship, duplicate publications, and COI. Through an iterative process and consensus, we have modified and revised our policies and statements on these issues. These revisions will be included starting in this issue of the *Journal's* Information for Authors section, as well as the guidelines for manuscript submission on our Website when authors submit their manuscript to the *Journal* for publication considerations.

AUTHORSHIP AND DUPLICATE PUBLICATIONS

Relevant changes as they pertain to authorship and duplicate publications (printed in the Information for Authors section) are:

- (1). A general statement will be added.

The *Journal* adheres to the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals established by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE; www.icmje.org), and authors should adhere to these requirements. The principles of this document, including those related to overlapping (duplicate) publication, authorship, and disclosure of potential COI, apply equally to manuscripts for consideration in this *Journal* or in a separate supplement.

- (2). Statements will be added regarding authorship.

All authors should meet the ICMJE criteria for authorship. In particular, for byline authors, authorship credit should be based on substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and final approval of the version to be published. Authors should meet all three conditions. All persons designated as authors qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed. The letter accompanying the manuscript should include the statement, "All authors meet the criteria for authorship stated in the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals." Within the Acknowledgments section and under the subheading "Author's Contributions," all authors' specific areas of contributions should be listed. In addition, any writer or editor assisting the authors but who does not fulfill all criteria for authorship should be acknowledged in the manuscript, including a description of their role in the manuscript, affiliation(s), and source(s) of support. (For example, a professional or medical writer who prepares a manuscript on behalf of another author ("ghost writer") should not be listed as an author but his or her specific role should be stated in this section.)

- (3). With regards to our duplication publication policy statement, the following single-sentence change will be implemented.

"Any such research should be referred to in the JAGS paper" will be changed to "Such research should be referred

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to and referenced in the *JAGS* paper. In the event that the research uses a database from which one or more other papers have been previously published, the manuscript submitted to *JAGS* need not reference all papers previously published from the database but should reference those previous papers that are pertinent to the submission.”

Conflict of Interest

The issue of COI required substantial attention, discussion, and subsequent modifications.

- (1). There must be adequate and full disclosure of potential conflicts. To facilitate this process, the following definitions were agreed upon.
 - (a). *Financial conflicts*: employment or affiliation, grants or funding, honoraria, speaker forum membership, consultant, stock ownership or options (excluding mutual funds), royalties, expert testimony, advisory board, or patents (pending, filed, or received) as they relate to the sponsoring agent, products, technology, or methodologies involved in the manuscripts submitted for publication. Medical education companies that the sponsoring agent or company associated with the product, technology, or methodology described in the submitted manuscripts(s) does not own or operate and that serve to organize and prepare manuscripts for submission are generally not considered a potential conflict.
 - (b). *Personal conflicts*: a close family or personal relationship with owners or employees of the sponsoring agent or company associated with product, technology, or methodology described in the submitted manuscript.
 - (c). *Full or adequate disclosure*: each author addresses each of the specific categories of financial and personal conflicts.
 - (d). *Potential conflict*: any circumstance or competing interest that could be construed or perceived as influencing the interpretation of the results.

The time period for applying the criteria for COI is 3 years before the time the manuscript is submitted (submission date) to the *Journal*.

- (2). The *Journal* will require that each author provide information on each of the elements of financial and personal conflicts by submission of a COI checklist accompanying the manuscript. (See Table 1 for suggested format.) The editor and editorial office will review the COI document and provide a summary of any COI within the Acknowledgments section of the manuscript under the subheading “Conflict of Interest” (which will replace the previous subheading “Financial Disclosure”). For example, if no conflicts were apparent, we will indicate: “The editor finds no conflicts of interest for any of the authors.” Alternatively, if a conflict is noted: “The editor noted that Joe Smith (fictitious name) declares grant support and honoraria from X company.” The COI document will be kept in the editorial office file, although a COI document must be submitted with each new manuscript (not revisions), regardless of whether a prior COI statement was provided with a previously submitted or accepted manuscript. Failure to submit a complete COI docu-

Table 1. Suggested Format for Conflict of Interest Checklist

	Author 1*	Author 2	Author 3	Etc.
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Employment or affiliation				
Grants/funds				
Honoraria				
Speaker forum				
Consultant				
Stocks				
Royalties				
Expert testimony				
Board member				
Patents				
Personal relationship				
Briefly explain each “yes”:				

*Authors can be listed by abbreviations of their names.

ment with each manuscript will result in termination of further review of the manuscript. Please note that the authors must continue to complete the statement under the subheading “Author’s Contributions” (as noted previously) and “Sponsor’s Role” within the Acknowledgments section.

- (3). The editor in chief and deputy editor will determine whether there is adequate or full disclosure of COIs based on review of the manuscript, COI checklist, and information provided by other editors and referees. The editor in chief or deputy editor will contact the author(s) if there appears to be a lack of adequate or full disclosure of COIs. The author(s) can submit a rebuttal. Following a rebuttal (or if no rebuttal is provided), the decision by the editor in chief or deputy editor will be final.
- (4). The *Journal* will publish any identified COIs that were not previously reported in a future issue of *JAGS* as an erratum.
- (5). Any or all authors identified as failing to adequately or fully disclose COIs will be banned from submitting future manuscripts to *JAGS* for a minimum period of 2 years, which will be imposed from the date the editor in chief or deputy editor makes such a decision.
- (6). The COI policy also applies to all editors and reviewers or referees, although they are not required to submit a COI document but must decline reviewing a manuscript if a COI potentially exists as defined above. Failure to fully disclose a COI involving a manuscript under review may lead to disciplinary actions by the editor in chief including a ban from future reviewing of manuscripts, dismissal from the editorial board, and resignation as an editor. If a reviewer or editor is uncertain whether a COI exists, she or he should contact the editor in chief for consultation.

It should be clear from these revised and modified policies and statements that the editors and members of the editorial board of *JAGS* take seriously the importance of integrity

and trust in scientific publications. The *Journal* continues to enjoy great success as one of the leading journals in the world in the field of geriatrics, gerontology, and long-term care. Such recognition can only be sustained by publishing high-quality and relevant articles that meet the scrutiny and rigorous standards expected by our peers, professional organizations, funding agencies, and most importantly, our patients and their caregivers.

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