

JAMA to Require Disclosure of All Conflicts By Authors Submitting Papers for Publication

All authors of articles hoping to publish in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* soon will have to disclose all potential conflicts of interest--or declare that there are no conflicts--in the acknowledgment section of their manuscript in an effort by the medical journal to improve its ethics policies.

The policy change, scheduled to take effect in January 2007, was announced in the July 12 issue of *JAMA*. Between July 12 and the end of 2006, the medical journal will allow authors to submit manuscripts that do not contain the conflict information, but the policy requires that this information must be obtained and submitted "promptly" and before any revisions are considered.

"Conflicts of interest in biomedical science continue to be under intense and increasing scrutiny. To help ensure transparency and complete reporting of this information, *JAMA's* policies on conflicts of interest have been updated," *JAMA* editors Annette Flanagin, Phil B. Fontanarosa, and Catherine DeAngelis wrote in their July 12 editorial.

JAMA has encouraged authors to disclose conflicts of interests since the mid-1980s, and last year began requiring authors to indicate if they have no conflicts in the subject matter of their manuscript. But because different biomedical journals have different policies on disclosure, the editors said some authors may not completely understand *JAMA's* requirements, causing some to disclose conflicts in the manuscripts while others only put that information in the cover letter or authorship form.

"The result is an inconsistent approach whereby for some authors, the disclosure is completely transparent to all involved in the manuscript evaluation process, including peer reviewers; but for other authors, the disclosure is made public only at the time of publication. In addition, some authors continue to misunderstand what is expected and provide inaccurate or incomplete disclosures that are discovered after publication and result in a published correction or letter of explanation," the *JAMA* editors wrote.

Separately, in a July 11 statement, Merrill Goozner, director of science integrity for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, called on biomedical journals to adopt strong penalties for authors who fail to disclose, such as a three-year ban from publishing adopted by *Environmental Health Perspectives*. The statement criticized *JAMA* for a disclosure policy that was inconsistent and "lacked teeth."

"It's clear that the *Journal of the American Medical Association* does not evaluate conflict of interest disclosures when articles are submitted. As a result, some authors with blatant conflicts of interest apparently feel

they can ignore the journal's policy with impunity," Goozner said.

