Editorial

Conflict of interest or competing interest: What is in the name?

Mohammed Abdul Hannan Hazari [iD]

Department of Physiology, Deccan College of Medical Sciences, Kanchanbagh, Hyderabad-500058, Telangana, India.

In this month i.e. December 2019, International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME) came up with the updated version of the document titled 'Recommendations for the conduct, reporting, editing, and publication of scholarly work in medical journals' **[1]**. The recommendation II.B was reframed as 'Disclosure of financial and non-financial relationships and activities, and conflicts of interest' compared to the previous version wherein only the phrase – 'Conflicts of interest' appeared. Also the recommendation II.B.2 was rewritten as 'Reporting relationships and activities' instead of 'Reporting conflict of interest'. There is a huge potential of bias when conflicts of interest are present. The primary responsibility of collecting and reporting of disclosures of relationships and activities from all authors and contributors lie with the corresponding author. Earlier major part of conflict of interest was focused on financial relations. With changing economic scenario globally, more elements have been added under financial conflict of interest. Apart from financial interests other interests may also represent or are perceived as conflicts such as personal relationships or rivalries, academic competition and intellectual beliefs which can be grouped under 'Non-financial interests' **[1]**. Mere presence of relationships and activities of authors/researchers with entities concerning the research conduct does not necessarily mean existence of conflict of interest. COI arises when such relationship or activities influence the judgment of the researcher(s) and overall outcome of the research study.

Hence, the question arises 'What is in the name?'. Terminologies like 'Conflict of interest' or 'Competing interest' indicate a problematic influence on research output and manuscript's content. Therefore, ICMJE now recommend the phrase 'Disclosure of relationships and activities' instead of 'Disclosure of conflict of interest'. Consequent to these updated guidelines, ICMJE came up with a 'Proposed ICMJE disclosure form' **[2]**. Once finalized and approved, the new ICMJE disclosure form will eventually replace the current 'ICMJE form for the disclosure of potential conflicts of interest' which is in use for past one decade. This change in nomenclature signifies the ongoing shift in the nature of relations and associations with evolving business structures and organizational dealings.

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Corresponding author

Dr. Mohammed Abdul Hannan Hazari
Professor and Head
Department of Physiology, Deccan College of Medical Sciences, DMRL 'X' Road, Kanchanbagh, Hyderabad-500058, Telangana, India.

Phone: +91-9160164070

Email: hannanhazari@deccancollegeofmedicalsciences.com

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