

Conflict of Interest & its Management

By

Adebayo O. ADEJUMO RN PhD FWACN

E-mail-bisiandbayo@yahoo.com / (234) 803-491 9002

Lecturer, Dept. of Psychology, & Centre for West African
Bioethics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
Sept, 2012

Introduction

- ◆ Individual's Personal Interest Vs. Organizational Interest
- ◆ Conflicts of Interest is Unavoidable in Research & Clinical Situations
- ◆ Need for Regulations & Steps to Prevent, Identify, & Manage the Conflicts
- ◆ How Well are Research Institutions Managing their Responsibilities

Introduction

- ◆ The Stringency of Financial Conflict of Interest Policies Varies Substantially among Institutions, as does the Diligence of Enforcement.
- ◆ Disclosing Conflicts of interest as Part of the Informed-Consent Process.

Meaning

- ♦ Any situation in which an individual or corporation (either private or governmental) is in a position to exploit a professional or official capacity (role) in some way for their personal or corporate benefit (role).
- ♦ A conflict of interest may exist even if there are no improper acts as a result (“Conflict of Roles” & Conflict of Interest)
- ♦ A person with two roles (e.g. a stockholder and government official) may experience situations where those two roles conflict

Meaning

- ♦ An ethics committee member whose protocol (or Spouse) is for review during a committee session may have conflict of interest because of the dual roles
- ♦ Having two roles is not illegal, but the differing roles may provide an incentive for improper acts in some circumstances
- ♦ The conflict can be mitigated- but it still exists

Conflict of Interest & Legality

- ◆ Having a Conflict of Interest is not, in & of itself, Evidence of Wrong Doing
- ◆ For Many Professionals, it is Virtually Impossible to avoid Conflicts of Interest from time to time
- ◆ It can however, become a legal matter if an individual tries influencing the outcome of the decision for personal benefit (a breach of the Duty of Loyalty)

Types of Conflicts of Interest

- ◆ **Individual/Personal:**
 - ◆ Public & Private interests compete, if not collide.
- ◆ **Institutional:**
 - ◆ Host Institution has interests in a study proposed for the institutional ethics committee review
- ◆ **Financial/Non Financial**
- ◆ **Outside employment**
- ◆ **Family interests**

Individual Financial Conflicts of Interest

- ◆ Situations in which financial considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising an investigator's professional judgment in conducting or reporting research.
 - The bias may affect
 - ✓ collection, analysis, and interpretation of data,
 - ✓ hiring of staff, procurement of materials, sharing of results,
 - ✓ choice of protocol, involvement of human participants,
 - ✓ the use of statistical methods

Improper Conducts & Conflicts of Interest

- ◆ Accepting bribes can be classified as corruption
- ◆ Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information, in itself, should not be considered conflict of interest
- ◆ Use of government or corporate property or assets for personal use is fraud

Ways to Mitigate Conflict of Interest

- ◆ Avoid them entirely

Suggestions

- ◆ Increasing accountability through full disclosure of conflicts or financial ties, both individual and institutional
- ◆ Using Ethics Committees that are independent from an institution
- ◆ Increasing community representation and the diversity of professionals that serve on Ethics Committees

Suggestions

- ◆ Acknowledging the burden & insufficient resources of Ethics Committees
- ◆ Individuals should divest themselves from these interests or recuse themselves from responsibility for research oversight
- ◆ Physical separation of certain facilities; placement of restrictions on information shared; & the provisions of oversight by independent review panels

Suggestions

- ◆ Restoration of balance to industry-academia relationships, thereby promoting progress while maintaining public trust in research

Remember



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- ◆ Conflict of interest consists of a set of conditions by which professional judgment concerning a primary interest tends to be unduly influenced by a secondary interest

Remember

- ◆ With a board, the primary interest is the business, mandate, or responsibility of the board, being influenced by a board member's secondary (individual) interest.
- ◆ Conflicts of interest have an erosive effect on trust in science, damaging the attitude of the public toward scientists and their research and also weakening the trusting interdependence of scientists

Summary

- ◆ Conduct of scientific research in an ethically sound way should be the focus of research ethics committees
 - Both the research ethics committees and investigators have shared responsibilities
 - ✓ Using the regulations that guide the conduct of REC business in reviewing protocols

Conclusion

- ◆ Investigators are expected to comply with regulations guiding the development & submission of research proposals for ethical review
- ◆ This paper highlighted these guidelines
- ◆ Strict compliance to these regulations will increase the realization of safe ethical studies.