

Conflict of Interest Policy for The Canadian Council of Cardiovascular Nurses

Background

For all CCCN Board of Directors meetings, and at the Annual General Meeting of CCCN, all members are required to verbally disclose an actual or potential conflict of interest. At the March 3 & 4, 2007 Board of Directors meeting it was determined that CCCN did not have a policy regarding conflict of interest issues. A working group was formed to explore this issue and develop a draft policy for consideration at the next meeting.

Working group members:

Wes Clark, Executive Director

Paula Price, Provincial Director Alberta, NWT, & Nunavut

Coby Scheidt, Provincial Director Saskatchewan

The working group reviewed the conflict of interest policies and procedures from the American Heart Association (AHA), the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSFC), the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), and the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (ILCOR).

Summary of Literature Review

Definition

A Conflict of Interest (COI) exists when an individual has personal or organizational interests in a decision or outcome that may have or may be perceived to have personal benefit, or may or may be perceived to, differ from the interests of the organization for which he/she is making (or helping to make) a decision (HSFC, 2001).

General Themes

1. The existence of a COI does not imply any kind of wrongdoing, nor does it imply fault or blame; however, failure to disclose or resolve a COI may constitute wrongdoing (HSFC, 2001).
2. It is not always possible or prudent to avoid conflict situations because experts in a clinical area often have relationships that could pose a real or potential COI in that area (ILCOR, 2004).
3. Conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to:
 - Any question in which the member or a member of his/her immediate family has a direct or indirect financial, business or commercial interest, however small, which may conflict with interests of the organization (CNA, 2006);
 - When an individual is in a position to influence or make financial or commercial decisions for the organization, a conflict of interest may exist if the individual has obligations to persons with whom the organization deals as a contributor, supplier of goods and services, or as a recipient of services or funds from the organization, or a potentially competing organizational interest (HSFC, 2001);

- Other bases of potential conflicts of interest, such as in-kind support, intellectual collaboration or intellectual investment in one's own ideas, or a long-term research agenda in which an investigator has invested substantial time (ILCOR, 2004);
- Any other matter in which the member's ability to act in the best interest of the organization may be or appear to be compromised by an outside interest (CNA, 2006).

4. All conflicts of interest (actual, potential, or perceived) are to be disclosed (either verbally or in writing) at the beginning of a meeting.
5. A member who has a COI (actual, potential, or perceived) may (ILCOR, 2004) or may not (AHA, 2007; CNA, 2000) be allowed to participate in discussions related to the topic of the COI.
6. A member who has a COI (actual, potential, or perceived) must abstain from voting on the topic but is entitled to attend the meeting and is still included in determining quorum. The abstention is recorded in the minutes. At times, the individual may be asked to leave the room during the vote.
7. A COI (actual, potential, or perceived) that is disclosed is usually deliberated on by either the Chair of the meeting or a COI panel and the COI is evaluated and appropriate action determined.
8. It is essential that all potential conflicts are disclosed and managed effectively. Disclosure is the mainstay of effective management of the potential COI (ILCOR, 2004).
9. If a COI is declared it is recorded in the minutes of the meeting and all members at the meeting are made aware of any written or verbally disclosed COI.
10. COI procedures apply to all members of the board of directors, executive, staff, delegates, participants, observers, and others working on any organizational projects.

Draft Conflict of Interest Policy for CCCN

Preamble

In carrying out their responsibilities all volunteers, participants, and staff of the CCCN shall comply with the Conflict of Interest Policy established by the CCCN. For purposes of this COI policy, volunteers are those who hold elected office or who serve on committees, participants are those delegates attending scientific/professional sessions, and staff are those employed by CCCN.

The Council recognizes that individuals associated with CCCN often have professional relationships with other organizations. Even Provincial Directors, who are members of the Board of Directors, have fiduciary responsibilities to both their provincial division and the national Council, and these interests may innately be in conflict. This policy is not meant to prevent COI, but rather manage or resolve any COI that may arise.

Definition

A conflict of interest (COI) exists when an individual associated with the CCCN has a personal, financial, intellectual, or organizational interest that may compromise, or appear to compromise, his/her ability to act in the best interest of CCCN.

Policy

- i. All individuals associated with CCCN must disregard any personal or outside organizational interest so that their decisions or actions are made in the best interests of CCCN.
- ii. The primary responsibility for identifying and disclosing a COI lies with the individual.
- iii. All COI (actual, potential, or perceived) shall be disclosed verbally (or in writing) prior to the beginning of a CCCN meeting, at the beginning of an elected officer's term in office, and, for staff, at the beginning of employment. All presenters (oral and poster) and invited speakers shall disclose all COI prior to presenting at the national CCCN Scientific Sessions.
- iv. Individuals must disclose any financial, business or commercial interest, however small, which may conflict with interests of the Council. Any gifts or payments received from any organization or group that does, or is seeking to do, business with the Council must be disclosed to the President when the nature of the relationship and/or the exchange of gifts may conflict with Council interests.
- v. The use of information not available to the public that has been acquired during official Council duties must not be used to benefit any individual. Individuals are required to exercise strict control over information, including that which is confidential, which may come into their possession in the course of their duties with the Council. Such information must not be disclosed to persons who are not authorized by the Council to receive it.
- vi. All COI (actual, potential, or perceived) disclosures shall be managed by the Chair of the meeting. In the case of a COI disclosed by the Chair, the COI shall be managed by the Executive Committee.
- vii. If a COI (actual, potential, or perceived) is disclosed, the President (or the Executive Committee in the case of disclosure by the President) shall either:
 - a) inform the individual there is no COI and the individual may proceed; or
 - b) determine there may be a COI and inform the individual further consultation with appropriate individuals is necessary prior to proceeding; or
 - c) determine there is a COI. In this case it is at the discretion of the President (or the Executive Committee) whether the individual is allowed to participate in any discussions related to the topic. If a COI is determined, the individual must remove him/herself from the room when any decisions involving the matter occur.
- viii. On discovery of a COI that has not been disclosed, and if after investigation and review by the President (or Executive Committee), the COI is found to exist, the individual's terms of involvement with the Council will be reviewed.

Further points for discussion:

1. The HSFC has an official Conflict of Interest Panel that determines whether situations conflict with the interests of the Foundation – Does CCCN want to go this route?
2. The HSFC also has in their policy that committee and sub-committee members are required to complete a formal statement of disclosure and verbally disclose any potential conflicts of interest at the first meeting of the committee or sub-committee each year. Also all committee and sub-committee members are required to disclose the COI in writing to the appropriate committee chair, with a copy to the President.

References

American Heart Association. (n.d.). *American Heart Association Conflict of Interest Policy*. Retrieved March 12, 2007, from <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3023759>

Canadian Nurses Association. (March, 2006). *Policy GP-9 Conflict of Interest*. Ottawa: Author.

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. (February, 2001). *Policy 7.5.5 Conflict of Interest*. Ottawa: Author.

ILCOR Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedures (September 13, 2004). Retrieved March 10, 2007, from <http://c2005.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3033464>