

Webinar 19/3/20 – Questions & Answers

1. **Am I right in thinking the new guidelines just apply to new reviews?** We have a number that are under development at protocol stage where the authors have complied with 2014, but may fall foul of 2020 and the reviews are not yet published. (Maybe add a statement the authors were compliant (with 2014) at the title and protocol stage.

Answer: Yes, the 2020 policy only applies to titles that were registered after the new policy is launched or updates that started after the launch. If work was already underway on a title, protocol or review before the 2020 policy was launched then the 2014 policy applies.

2. **Does the single DOI entry point mean that the Funding Arbiters will be able to access information on potential Conflicts of Interest directly from forms in Archie if a referral is made?**

Answer: No, the DOI and referral forms are on separate platforms. It's possible this could change when we have a new Editorial Management System (EMS) but it is not planned currently.

3. **Have there been any changes to what you consider 'financial conflict of interest?'**

Answer: The types of activity that are could be considered as a conflict of interest have not changed (see Section 5 Funding and Interests), although there has been a clarification about royalties.

4. **I'm pleased to see that the revised policy clearly gives a timeframe for relevant conflicts, which was unclear in the 2014 version. How is the revised policy going to affect the editorial workflow, for example when to send out COI forms, and how often to evaluate what is written in the DOI section in a review? Are there plans to automate the process for adding information from COI forms straight into the review to avoid human error that occurs in manually copying and pasting? How do we maintain output if a large number of editors can no longer contribute?**

Answer: The points at which DOIs should be reviewed by the CRG are set out in the 2020 policy (see Section 7.2).

Answer: Auto-generating DOI statements from the information provided in the DOI is not straight forward and is commonly handled manually at other journals. However we will explore option to implement this type of auto-generation with our new Editorial Management System (EMS) provider.

Answer: If some editors wish to continue receiving financial support from commercial organizations that have an interest in the CRG topic area this could pose a challenge. For editors who are willing to cease receiving funding, it is important to remember that they are not being asked to divest themselves of financial conflicts of interest immediately on policy launch. If some CRGs lose a large number of their editors that would be an issue for discussion.

5. **Is there a part in the policy update that deals with authors with strong opinions on the intervention? I mean when the author thinks an intervention doesn't work.**

Answer: Section 5.4 Other (non-financial) relevant interests, covers instances where a contributor might have a strongly held opinion about an intervention. Authors are required

to declare their perspectives, experiences, and professional positions for the sake of transparency but the policy does NOT specifically ban people with strong opinions from participating in the creation of Cochrane Library content.

- 6. What about cases where some of the authors of the Cochrane review are authors of included studies, and helped determine the inclusion criteria before these rules came in place? When the review is then updated, does that pose an issue?**

Answer: As per [MECIR Update standards \(conduct\)](#) previously identified studies should be revisited (U8). This may affect the role that an existing author can play in the update, if that person was involved in producing and of the studies that were eligible for inclusion in the review. The historical determination of eligibility criteria may not be affected by the new rule when it comes to updating, but this would be determined on a case by case basis, so a referral should be made to the COI Arbiter if this situation arises.

- 7. What is really meant by a "specific interest in the outcome of the review" and is this spelt out in policy? Surely most funders/authors have a specific interest in the outcome of the review?**

Answer: The definitions table sets out the difference between what is considered to be a Commercial organization with a financial interest and a not-for-profit organization. Many reviews are funded, directly or indirectly, by not-for-profit organizations such as government health departments and the revised policy is not at all intended to ban this type of funding or support. Rather, it simply points out that even though a not-for-profit organization may not gain financially as a result of taking a specific position about a healthcare intervention, it still may try to influence the conduct, conclusions or publication of that review. An example of this would be a charitable foundation, that has a well-publicized position on the value of an intervention, that advocates for that intervention. It's important to note that there is no outright ban on not-for-profit organization. The revised policy offers a way for CRGs that have any concerns in this area, to raise the issue with the COI Arbiter and the Editor in Chief.

- 8. Will there be a shorten 'quick guide'/ checklist CRGs can send to authors along with the full policy? As I am concerned that authors will not read a 12 page document on Col as they don't often read much of the guidance we provide authors!!**

Answer: Yes, the COI Implementation Team can develop a checklist

- 9. Will there be retrospective application of the rules on involvement in included studies? Many Cochrane reviews were set up by people who ran trials in the topic.**

Answer: None of the new rules are being applied retrospectively, but when a review is updated the 2020 policy will apply. If some review authors were involved in conducting clinical trials that are eligible for inclusion in the review then they may be affected by the changes at update stage. Specifically this impacts first or last authors who have been involved in industry-controlled studies.

- 10. Another question on updates - where a senior author from the previous version is now considered conflicted (because of authoring primary studies), does this mean they can no longer have role of senior author on an update of the review? Does Cochrane have suggestions for how to communicate this as some authors may find it difficult and it may prove an uncomfortable conversation for editorial staff?**

Answer: If a first (or last) author was involved in an industry-controlled study then they could not have the same position at update stage. If it was not an industry-controlled study, then that restriction would not apply. It is also important to note that even if the author was involved in an industry-controlled study, they can still be in the author line-up, just not first of last.

The COI Implementation Team is happy to provide advice or support in communicating the changes to authors. The CRGs know their authors better than anyone else does but we could provide additional support by creating email templates, and announcements to help with those sensitive or challenging conversations.

- 11. Some authors have built a career on a particular intervention; they may have helped to developed it and evidence of efficacy means they may get more research funding. Is this considered financial conflict of interest?**

Answer: This would be considered more of an academic or professional interest which should be declared but is not considered to be a conflict and would not be prohibit an author from participating in the creation of Cochrane Library content. Of course if an author has been involved in the primary studies which are eligible for inclusion in the review then some restrictions may apply (see Section 5.6)

- 12. If someone gives an educational talk for a company on a topic that complies with the commercial guidelines and is not related to a specific drug do they come off, or if the author donates the fee to charity personally?**

Answer: It is difficult to give general advice about specific cases like this. Such cases should be referred to the COI Arbiter, with full details of the financial interest and payment arrangements.

- 13. Will an FAQ be prepared and include all the Q&As asked at the COI policy webinars?**

Answer: Yes, the FAQ on the portal will be treated as a living resource with questions raised during training sessions and webinars being added to it over time.

- 14. Is Cochrane doing anything to work with other journals to make their policies tighter? Obviously it would be better to remove conflicts across the board, rather than risk authors simply publishing elsewhere.**

Answer: Cochrane is not in a position to directly influence the approach taken by other journals when it comes to their COI policies. However part of Lisa Bero's role as Senior Editor for Research Integrity, is to advance Cochrane's research integrity agenda, in part by modelling and promoting rigorous COI management. Other biomedical journals such as BMJ are considering implementing more rigorous COI policies, which is certainly something Cochrane would welcome and encourage.