

ASRS Policy on Managing Conflicts of Interest

Financial conflicts of interest pose many significant challenges to the retina community and the public. They raise concerns about the objectivity and trustworthiness of research, the prudent management of our scientific organizations, and the commitment of our profession to the best interests of patients. At the same time, when relationships with industry are properly structured, they can be appropriate, beneficial, and collaborative partnerships that lead to the development of valuable new therapies and devices. In fact, our specialty has a history rich with examples of effective collaborations with industry in the pursuit of innovations that improve the lives of our patients.

The American Society of Retina Specialists (ASRS) seeks to balance the important benefits of physician–industry relationships with the significant risk that the financial goals of industry may conflict with the professional goals of ASRS members. In doing so, the ASRS recognizes that it has a profound duty to its members, the larger medical community, and the public to ensure the integrity of all of its scientific, educational, and advocacy activities and materials.

Introduction

The American Society of Retina Specialists provides continuing medical education (CME), advocacy, and public information to enhance the retina specialist's ability to deliver the highest possible quality of eye care for patients. In the context of this Conflict of Interest policy, CME encompasses the ASRS' full spectrum of educational activities, including those qualifying for CME credit, as well as the ASRS' non-credit-bearing educational initiatives, programming and products, including but not limited to ASRS website content, practice management resources, and publications. The ASRS has a profound duty to its members, the larger medical community, and the public to ensure the integrity of all of its scientific, educational, advocacy, and consumer information activities and materials. Thus, each ASRS Board member, committee Chair, committee member, and representative to other organizations ("ASRS Leader"), as well as the ASRS staff and those responsible for organizing and presenting CME activities must disclose and manage conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest that affect this integrity. Where such conflicts or perceived conflicts exist, they must be appropriately and fully disclosed and resolved.

The ASRS considers financial relationships to create actual conflicts of interest when individuals have both a financial relationship with a commercial interest and the opportunity to affect ASRS policy or the content of CME about the products or services of that commercial interest. The potential for maintaining or increasing the value of the financial relationship with the commercial interest creates an incentive to influence the content of the CME – an incentive to insert commercial bias.

I. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

A. All ASRS Leaders will be asked to disclose the following information on the ASRS Leader Financial Disclosure Form indicating:

- Any financial relationships (i.e., not just "relevant" financial relationships) with manufacturers of commercial ophthalmic products or providers of commercial ophthalmic services within the past 12 months
- Board of Directors (BOD) members who are involved in other CME activities requiring a financial disclosure will make the same activity-related disclosure as other CME providers.

B. All ASRS members planning, developing, or delivering CME will be asked to disclose the following information on the ASRS CME Financial Disclosure Form indicating:

- Any relevant financial relationships a meeting presenter, author,

or contributor has had with manufacturers of commercial ophthalmic products or providers of commercial ophthalmic services within the past 12 months. The ASRS defines "relevant" financial relationships as those with a commercial ophthalmic interest and the opportunity to affect the content of CME about the products or services of that commercial ophthalmic interest.

- Meeting presenters, authors, or contributors who report they have no known relevant financial relationships to disclose will declare "No Financial Relationships".

C. The ASRS staff shall send an annual reminder to ASRS Leaders to submit an initial ASRS Leader Disclosure Form, or to review and update the Disclosure on file. The Annual Meeting, *Retina Times*, Practice Management meeting, and website educational content participants will follow the disclosure submission procedures established for these activities.

D. The ASRS may disqualify anyone who does not complete (or revise as appropriate) the applicable Disclosure Form after a second reminder.

1. A second reminder will state that the individual may not participate in relevant Board, committee, or ASRS Representative activities, or in planning, developing or delivering any ASRS CME without a current Disclosure on file. In addition, such notice will explain the consequences of not providing the Disclosure.
2. If the member does not provide an adequate Disclosure within 30 days of the receipt of the second notice, the member will become ineligible to participate in the CME activity in any manner until the form is received. For ASRS Leaders, failure to submit the ASRS Leader Financial Disclosure Form within 30 days of the second notice will disqualify the member from participation in the committee, other ASRS body or representative activities until the Disclosure is received. If the ASRS Leader is unwilling to complete the form, (s)he will be asked to resign from the committee, other ASRS body, or representative position.
3. The appropriate Super-Committee Chairperson shall be notified of the disqualification. If the disqualification is of a Super-Committee Chairperson, the disqualification shall be reported to the ASRS President.

E. ASRS members planning, developing, or delivering CME activities and ASRS Leaders are responsible for updating their Financial Disclosures throughout the year for every substantial change in actual or potential conflicts of interest, whether financial or non-financial.

II. AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATION OF ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS

A. All Disclosures of financial and potentially relevant non-financial relationships shall be sent to the ASRS Executive Director and the committee chairperson ("Chair") responsible for the planning and implementation of ASRS activities.

B. The Chair shall alert all reviewers, panelists, committee members, and authors of all relevant financial and non-financial conflicts of interest relevant to a particular activity.

C. The Chair shall periodically remind all who are involved in planning and implementation of an activity to be cognizant of others' financial and non-financial disclosures, and shall encourage all to identify and discuss potential conflicts.

D. As set forth below, ASRS staff will ensure that all financial relationships with all health-related entities are made known at the beginning of every activity.

E. For print, web-based, or recorded non-live materials ("Enduring Materials"), it is the staff's responsibility to ensure that adequate Financial Disclosures are included in each document.

F. For *Retina Times* activities, it is the responsibility of the Editor and staff to

ensure that adequate Financial Disclosures are included in each publication.

G. For Live Activities, staff shall:

1. Notify the activity organizer, all faculty, panelists, and other presenters of their obligations to provide adequate disclosures.
2. Establish and enforce a “first slide” policy to ensure Financial Disclosure is made known to all participants prior to the activity.
3. Ensure that the activity organizer, all faculty, panelists, and other presenters are informed that the intent of the “first slide” policy is served by adequate “dwell time” of the slide, commensurate with the length of the text shown; ideally with simultaneous verbal presentation of the first slide content.
4. Monitor presentations as often as is practical to ensure that the intent of the disclosure procedures is served, including recommendations for modifications in requirements as circumstances may require.

H. Credit-bearing CME

1. All credit-bearing CME (“CB-CME”) activities are planned under the guidance of an ASRS committee.
2. All CB-CME activities require the approval of the CME Committee Chair and the Executive Director.
3. In the event that the Chair is conflicted, approval is granted by another designated member of the committee who is not.
4. The ASRS CME Committee or other committee designated by the BOD shall review all Enduring Materials.
5. The Executive Director will review checklists for all submissions before a credit code is assigned.
6. Every CB-CME activity must be evaluated by participant questionnaires.
7. Every evaluation questionnaire must address the participant’s impression of the presence or absence of commercial bias.
8. The Observer Report Form shall include a request for the Observer’s impression of the presence or absence of commercial bias. The ASRS CME Committee or other committee designated by the BOD will be advised of any significant allegations of commercial bias, based upon the frequency of the participant mentioned, and the specifics of the allegation.

III. MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS

A. For CME activities, a system of peer review, committee review, staff review and cross-checks to identify and recommend possible means of resolving a conflict shall be maintained.

1. Objectivity and the use of best available evidence should be encouraged.
2. Each person involved in the planning or execution of a particular CME activity should be encouraged to make the Chair or other person responsible for the activity aware of the need to manage a specified conflict. The Chair, program committee, or responsible person(s) shall review all Faculty Financial Disclosure Forms and course content prior to the activity.
3. If potential conflict of interest is detected, corrections will be recommended and implemented:
 - (a) Enduring Materials shall be edited as required.
 - (b) Live Activity Presenters shall be notified of concerns regarding conflict or potential conflict of interest prior to the activity and the Chair/Program Director and faculty shall work together to resolve or manage that conflict. Some possible steps that can be taken are:
 - Have the content reviewed and revised as necessary by experts who do not have relationships with the entity where the conflict lies
 - Limit the presentation to research results rather than therapeutic recommendations (i.e., “Therapy X stabilizes vision in 90% of patients and improves vision in 30% of patients” – no comment on whether or not this represents an “effective” or “useful” treatment “to consider,” etc.)
 - Select another speaker to present clinical implications after the primary speaker (with COI) has reported the scientific discovery
 - Change the focus of the presentation so that the content is not about products or services of the COI

- Ask the speaker with COI to recuse him/herself
- Ask the speaker to divest him/herself of all financial interests that have created the COI

4. If the steps in Section III (A.) (3) are not sufficient or applicable for managing the conflict or perceived conflict, or conflict is detected during a presentation the Chair or person responsible for a CME activity shall request that the BOD or a committee assigned by the BOD determine an appropriate response. The response may include:

- (a) Official notification and warning for the first occurrence, unless there is a failure to submit a required disclosure, as set forth in Section I above, which requires disqualification
- (b) For repeat offenses – Repeated failure to comply with the disclosure policy, when known and deliberate, will result in exclusion from contribution to ASRS educational content or leadership positions for one year

B. Resolution of Disclosed Conflicts among ASRS Leaders

The ASRS recognizes that Leaders often have a wide range of medical, scholarly, humanitarian and financial relationships, and participate in organizations and activities outside of the ASRS. As a natural consequence of these activities, conflicts or the perception of conflicts may arise from time to time for ASRS Leaders. These conflicts may be disclosed by the Leader, or identified by another Leader in an atmosphere of cooperation, rather than confrontation. The goal of effective management of these conflicts is to arrive at a collaborative and consensual resolution, as set forth in the procedures below.

1. The ASRS Leader who discloses a conflict or potential conflict, or to whom a fellow Leader identifies a perceived conflict, prepares a statement describing the conflict and suggesting ways of resolving or managing it. If a challenged Leader believes that a conflict does not exist, a response may be submitted. If there is consensus that a conflict exists, methods for resolution include highly specific confidentiality agreements; recusal from specific discussions, activities, or votes; voluntary resignation from committee Chair or other leadership positions; or by other means. A “Statement of Conflict Management” is submitted by committee members to their committee Chair and by chairpersons and BOD members to the BOD Operating Committee. If an Operating Committee member is submitting the statement, the Operating Committee or BOD will appoint two of their members to review the statement.
2. If the Statement of Conflict Management is accepted by the appropriate reviewer(s) as sufficient to manage the conflict, the terms of the statement will be accepted and distributed to the relevant committee or other ASRS body.
3. If the Statement of Conflict Management is not accepted, the reviewer will submit it to a three person review committee (Conflict Review Committee or “COR”) comprised of a committee member and two BOD members, appointed by the BOD Operating Committee. This review committee will work with the ASRS Leader to revise the Statement of Conflict Management such that the resolution is acceptable to the committee.
4. If the revised statement is acceptable, it shall be accepted and disseminated as above, with additional dissemination to be determined by the COR. Note that in some instances, an acceptable statement may include the requirement that the ASRS Leader step down from a particular position of leadership.
5. If no revised statement is agreed to by the ASRS Leader and the COR, the ASRS Leader and one member of the COR will present their recommendations to the Operating Committee of the BOD, and will make a recommendation of resolution to the full BOD. The BOD vote will be binding on the ASRS Leader.
6. Proposals for resolution of a conflict may not affect an ASRS Leader’s membership status.