Conflicts of Interest Policy

Funded Research Management Conflicts of Interest Policy

Overview

Myeloma UK works to ensure that research proposals are assessed objectively and impartially. Review by an appropriately constituted group is seen as an essential element of the decision-making process. The purpose of this document is to outline what constitutes a conflict of interest, and, in the event of a potential conflict of interest, what action should be taken. This aims to protect the charity as a whole, Myeloma UK employees, individuals who work with Myeloma UK as RAG members, peer reviewers or in any other advisory or decision making capacity, from any perception, real or otherwise, that personal or professional interests and affiliations might interfere with impartial, evidence-based decision making.

Principles

The notion of "conflict of interests" does not imply an immoral action. Conflicts may arise out of the facts and not from fraudulent motivations. They do not in themselves inevitably cause damage to personal or organisational reputations; it is ambiguity and the possibility for damage that arouse concern.

Individuals are not required to declare all associations they may have outside research functions of Myeloma UK, only those which relate to or could impact (or be perceived to impact) on the research activities of the charity. Individuals should register all relevant interests and should declare any relevant interest prior to dealing with or discussing a matter to which it is pertinent.

Relevant interests may include both financial and non-financial interests. The test of relevance is whether the interest might reasonably be thought to affect the way in which an individual discharges their duties. The test is not whether an individual's actions will be influenced by the interest but whether the public might reasonably think that this may be the case. It is up to each individual to decide if a conflict of interest could exist and, if so, to declare the conflict. When deciding on such matters, consideration must be given to how things could appear to others and, in all cases, individuals should err on the side of caution, declaring an interest if there is any possibility that a conflict of interest may exist.

Myeloma UK is improving the diversity of our research. We are making an active effort to recruit people from a range of backgrounds to our Research Advisory Group and peer review roles to ensure that diverse voices are represented and we collect and review data on other characteristics like disability, geography, and career stage to consider if additional targets are necessary.

Definitions

For Myeloma UK, a conflict of interest is defined as any financial, personal, professional or institutional interest or connection of any individual which may, if undeclared, expose Myeloma UK or any of its funded programmes or projects to the perception of or actual actual bias and/or inappropriate influence in call development, peer review or assessment, funding recommendations or scientific advice.

Financial conflict of interest:

- Anyone who has a direct or indirect financial interest with a grant application submitted to Myeloma UK.
- Equity interests (if worth £10,000 or more, or more than 1% of the total issued capital) in enterprises with involvement in pharmaceuticals, healthcare, biotech or related areas, or in any other enterprise that may have a real or perceived interest in the work of the charity. Third party investments (e.g. ISAs) should be held exempt from this.

Personal conflict of interest:

- Anyone who has a personal relationship with any applicant, including but not limited to partners, family members and close personal friends.

Professional conflict of interest:

- Anyone listed as main applicant or co-applicant on a grant application submitted to Myeloma UK.
- Anyone listed as a collaborator or having recently collaborated (within the past three years) with the listed main applicant and/or co-applicant(s) in a grant application submitted to Myeloma UK

Institutional conflict of interest:

- Anyone working in the same institution as the main applicant or co-applicant(s) listed on a grant application.

Competitive conflict of interest:

- Anyone who is an applicant on or has a personal or financial conflict of interest on an application to a grant round will be considered to have a conflict of interest with other applications to that grant round.

This list is not exhaustive. Anyone who considers they may have a conflict of interest not clearly described in this policy should contact the Myeloma UK secretariat at the earliest available opportunity. A decision will be made in consultation with the Chair and in alignment with the principles of this policy.

Declaration of interests

Any persons covered by this policy, as defined in the Overview section, must declare any interests of relevance on their appointment to the RAG and/or start of a specific activity such as peer review, and annually thereafter if still involved with the charity.

Discussion of proposals

Details of applications, meeting papers and related correspondence and the names of external referees are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside the review process.

Discussions of a proposal between members of the RAG which occur outside a RAG meeting should be declared to the Chair of the RAG and recorded in the minutes.

If any individual involved in the review or assessment of an application is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application, he or she may provide advice, but must report this to the Chair of the RAG and the Myeloma UK secretariat. They may subsequently be asked by the Chair to absent themselves from a discussion of the application concerned.

Managing conflicts of interest

Any individual invited to participate in a short-term research activity for Myeloma UK, such as providing peer review or scientific advice to the RAG, who is identified as having a conflict of interest, will be thanked and excused from participation.

The Vice Chair of the RAG is considered as a member for conflict of interest purposes, except where they are acting as Chair.

The secretariat will bring to the Chair's attention all relevant information concerning any form of connection between an application and a member of the RAG.

If any member of the RAG is concerned that another member or the Chair has a conflict of interest that has not been declared, they have a duty to inform the Head of Research at their earliest opportunity. The Head of Research and secretariat will manage the situation sensitively to protect the integrity and reputation of all parties.

Situation	Action
A RAG member has one or more financial, personal, professional or institutional conflicts of interest.	The member will not receive any relevant documentation and will be required to step out of any meeting during relevant discussions.
A RAG member has a competitive conflict of interest	The member will not receive any relevant documentation and will be required to step out of any meeting during relevant discussions for all applications to that call.
The Chair of the RAG has one or more financial, personal, professional, institutional or competitive conflicts of interest.	The Chair of the RAG will not receive any relevant documentation and will be required to step out of any meeting during relevant discussions for all applications to that call or relevant topics. The Vice Chair will take on the role of the Chair for relevant activities.

Resolution of conflicts of interest

The Charity recognises that the majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long-term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for the charity or to sit on its committees outside of the RAG.

In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within the charity. Where such a situation relates to a member of the RAG, the matter will be discussed by the Chair together with the secretariat and a decision made in line with the principles of this policy.