

ASN Provides Key Information to U.S. Senate Finance Committee

In December 2009, Senator Charles E. Grassley (R-IA), ranking minority member of the US Senate Finance Committee, wrote [33 nonprofit medical groups](#)—among them the American Society of Nephrology (ASN), the American Medical Association, and the American College of Physicians—to request information on industry funding awarded to those societies. As part of his ongoing review of medical education programs in the U.S., Senator Grassley asked each organization to supply detail about commercial support received in the years 2006 through 2009, as well as information about internal policies on managing and disclosing potential conflicts of interest.

ASN leaders were pleased to be able to send to Senator Grassley the information requested and share with the Senate Finance Committee the society's longstanding commitment to educational and scientific objectivity. ASN maintains a strong foundation of institutional integrity, integrity in its interactions with other organizations, and serves as a model for self governance and transparency.

Because ASN is an accredited provider of continuing medical education, the society adheres to the six "Standards for Commercial Support" recommended by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). These standards (www.accme.org) ensure independence and objectivity of the programs presented to physicians and other learners. Commercial interests do not plan, deliver or evaluate educational content provided by ASN, and ASN has established numerous means of separation between fundraising and planning, executing and evaluating educational programs.

Any professional society should actively and regularly assess potential conflicts of interest related to executing its mission, goals and agendas. Thus, in addition to supporting ACCME guidelines, ASN regularly examines and updates its own policies on managing potential conflicts. Most recently, ASN in 2008 convened the Committee on Corporate Relations, and this group conducted a comprehensive assessment of the society's mechanisms for addressing and managing potential conflicts. The ASN Committee on Corporate Relations presented its final report to the ASN Council in early 2009 and the committee's recommendations were endorsed unanimously.

This effort resulted in a number of advances such as developing a new section on the ASN website: the ASN Conflict of Interest Initiative: Transparency in Relationships with Commercial Interests (<http://www.asn-online.org/coi/>). This section, open to the public, provides a wealth of information about ASN as well as general resources on managing potential conflicts. In a further effort to provide vital information and resources to ASN members and others in the kidney community, ASN published the committee's final report and an editorial outlining ASN policies and plans for implementing the recommendations (*J Amer Soc Nephrol* 20:1853-59 and 1860-62).

ASN also provided Senator Grassley information on advertising in ASN journals and ASN Kidney News, meeting exhibits at ASN Renal Week and other ASN venues, as well as unrestricted educational grants for ASN Renal Week, Renal WeekEnds and the Annual Board Review Course and Update. Speakers at ASN meetings follow all ACCME standards regarding disclosure, and the society makes every effort to see that presenters disclose all potential conflicts of interest, and that sessions are moderated to meet these standards of disclosure.

Having successfully partnered in the past to advance patient care, clinical research, medical education, societies and commercial interests can continue to do so in the future provided they follow strict standards of disclosure, evaluation and documentation. ASN recognizes the value of inquiries such as those conducted by Senator Grassley and supports all efforts that promote effective policies such as those of outlined by the society at <http://www.asn-online.org/coi/>. ASN members, other kidney professionals and patients benefit from the society's ongoing review of its policies to ensure they appropriately support ASN's mission of promoting the highest quality care for patients, supporting cutting-edge research and educating the next generation of kidney professionals.