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Recently, government, media and interested groups such as the Institute of Medicine (IOM) have carefully examined relationships between physicians and commercial interests such as biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and medical device companies. Concerned about the dearth of data documenting the impact of potential conflicts of interest (COI) on the quality of medical research, education, and practice, IOM recently urged the federal government to study this issue.

In leading the fight against kidney disease, ASN supports medical research through grant funding, publication of peer-reviewed journals, and advocacy for improved national health policy. ASN also provides continuing medical education (CME) for nephrologists, helping them remain abreast of new innovations and elevate the quality of renal care. Like most medical professional societies, ASN has long solicited assistance from commercial interests to advance these vital activities.

ASN believes it is the responsibility of a professional society to actively assess the potential conflicts of interest that relate to the execution of activities imperative to its mission. To this end, ASN's Committee on Corporate Relations conducted a comprehensive year-long assessment of the Society's mechanisms for managing relationships with commercial interests. Policies and publications resulting from their efforts provide ASN and other medical societies compelling guidelines for ethical approaches to these important partnerships, and set new standards for protecting members from perceived bias.

Some organizations have recommended that societies such as ASN should eliminate all funding from commercial interests. Based on the comprehensive research and self-assessment conducted by the committee on corporate relations, ASN concludes that societies and industry can partner to advance patient care and promote essential research, provided they implement stringent standards of disclosure, evaluation, transparency, and documentation. At ASN, management of COI is an ongoing process incorporating guidance, discussion and input from members, staff, and other professional societies.

ASN's members, leadership, and staff are grateful to the committee on corporate relations for the considerable time and energy they devoted to conducting this research and developing ASN's COI policy. ASN calls upon other medical and scientific organizations to unite to articulate national standards for ethical management of the important relationships that advance research and improve the lives of patients.

For more information about ASN's efforts related to COI management, please contact ASN Policy Associate Rachel Shaffer at rshaffer@asn-online.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Coffman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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