
ASGE ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

Table of Contents

- [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#)
- [Definition](#)
- [Procedures](#)
- [Governing Board and Committee/Task Force Activities](#)
- [National Meetings and Courses](#)
- [Abstracts, Electronic Posters, Scholarships, Research Awards](#)
- [Audio-Visual Award](#)
- [Member Involvement in Society Projects with Financial Implications](#)
- [Conflict of Interest With Other National Medical Organizations and Societies](#)
- [Gifts to Physician from Industry](#)
- [Self-Referrals](#)
- [References](#)

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

The ASGE enjoys an excellent reputation among the practicing medical community, other medical societies, teaching centers, and private and governmental health care institutions and agencies. Because this reputation depends on the continuing confidence of these groups in the Society's integrity, the Governing Board has established a policy on conflict of interest. By accepting a position on the Governing Board or a committee or task force of the ASGE, an individual assumes the responsibility of complying with these guidelines. It should be emphasized that the presence of a conflict of interest does not necessarily imply ineligibility to serve, but it may necessitate that participation in some activities be modified or avoided. Such possible conflicts must be disclosed in writing; only in this way can participating members carry out their service to the ASGE and its mission. The Governing Board has given great deliberation to the development of this document. Every attempt has been made to allow activities of the Society to be conducted fairly. In the development of this guideline, the Governing Board has remained sensitive to members of the Society who may wish to serve and to avoid unnecessary restrictions which might discourage their participation in activities of the Society.

Definition

A conflict of interest is defined as involvement in a business, partnership, consulting position, in a financially or otherwise rewarding arrangement that may influence subsequent deliberations or actions, whether perceived or factual. The expectation that decisions and actions by the ASGE leadership will be unbiased and fair can be undermined by the perception of a conflict of interest. It is incumbent, therefore, upon each member to disclose any and all possible involvement in activities that may be perceived as establishing a conflict of interest and to remove oneself from discussions and voting on any actions that may be influenced by such conflict.

A. A financial conflict of interest may exist when your involvement or that of your spouse, parent, child, or business partner, with any commercial firm or organization, be it for-profit or otherwise, (hereafter referred to as FPC) in the health care field includes one or more of the following circumstances:

1. Consultant, scientific advisory committee member or lecturer for an FPC for which \$10,000 honorarium or loan or financial gain is derived or expected in a 12 month period. If an honorarium for a lecture is paid by a university, hospital or medical society which extends the invitation, disclosure is not required. If an honorarium is paid directly by an FPC organization, e.g., a pharmaceutical company, then disclosure is required. Professional partnerships or practice associations limited to distribution of income derived from patient care are excluded.

2. Officer, board member, trustee, owner or employee of an FPC.
3. Stock or bond holder in an FPC organization, including those of a self-directed pension plan.
4. Stock options are held in an FPC organization.
5. A patent is held or contemplated for an endoscopically related device or technology with the expectation of personal economic gain.

A conflict of interest does not include members' relationship with their own private practice unless that practice is doing business with ASGE.

B. A conflict of interest may also exist when you serve on the Governing Body of another national medical organization/society even if no financial benefits accrue to you.

Procedures

1. A disclosure statement has been developed by the ASGE.
2. This statement will be distributed to prospective members of the Governing Board, committees and task forces of the Society annually.
3. This disclosure statement should be completed whether or not a conflict of interest is perceived.
4. It is the participant's duty to submit the disclosure statement. If the participant fails to disclose a conflict of interest which is subsequently discovered, the Society may take action.
5. The disclosure statement should be made in writing to the Secretary of the Society.
6. The disclosure should reveal the nature of the perceived conflict of interest.
7. All disclosures will be held in strict confidence unless disclosure is required on a need-to-know basis. The disclosure statement will be kept in a confidential file maintained by the Executive Director of the Society.

Governing Board and Committee/Task Force Activities

All individuals serving on the Governing Board of the Society and members of ASGE committees and task forces will have a disclosure statement on file. It will be prepared and submitted prior to appointment and renewed on an annual basis.

When a conflict of interest is thought to exist by a Governing Board or committee/task force member, the President or committee chair should be notified. The individual with a perceived conflict of interest may not participate in discussion or vote on matters related to the conflict unless requested by the Body. The chair (or Governing Board president) or a designee will determine whether the individual who has perceived conflict of interest may take part in the discussion. If such participation is approved, revelation of the conflict will be made to others present with the permission of the individual who has a conflict. If the chair thinks a conflict exists, but the individual does not agree to a revelation, participation is not allowed. If participation is inappropriate, the individual will leave the room for the discussion as well as the vote. The minutes will reflect that the individual did not participate in the discussion or vote on the matter.

All Governing Board or Committee/Task Force members also are expected to avoid any activity performed on behalf of the society which has the potential to result in personal gain for themselves or members of their family except for paid activities approved by the Governing Board such as speaker or officer honoraria.

National Meetings and Courses

Any member of a faculty, planning committee, review group, etc. participating in a CME activity must disclose and resolve any potential conflicts of interest prior to the activity. The ASGE will require all participants to complete a Conflict of Interest Disclosure form during the planning stages of the activity. Each participant that has the opportunity to affect the content of the CME material and a financial interest with a commercial supporter will be required to disclose this information. Any conflicts that arise must be resolved prior to further development of the activity.

It is not possible to define all circumstances in which a conflict of interest may arise. A conflict of interest can be assumed to exist when an individual participating in a CME activity (and/or the individual's spouse or partner) is involved financially with a commercial supporter.

It is no longer acceptable to choose not to disclose potential conflicts of interest. Those refusing to disclose relationships will not be allowed to continue to participate in the CME activity. However, having conflicts of interests does not automatically disqualify an individual from participation in the CME activity. All conflicts of interests will be assessed using the ASGE Conflict of Interest Resolution policy.

Abstracts, Electronic Posters, Scholarships, Research Awards

It is important that every attempt be made to achieve fairness in the selection process for papers, posters and awards.

Regarding the selection for abstracts and electronic posters for the national meeting, the chair of the Annual Scientific Program Committee is a non-scoring member of the committee. In addition, the chair is provided with the names of the authors and institutions prior to the meeting of the Program Committee, while the voting members rank and subsequently select abstracts without knowledge of authors or institutions.

A committee member should not discuss his/her own abstract or vote upon it. It is also appropriate that the committee member not vote on or discuss a competing paper. Since the chair of the committee is aware of the authorship of the different submissions, it is his/her responsibility to make sure that this is carried out fairly.

Similar rules apply to the selection of winners of scholarships and research awards.

Audio-Visual Award

The Society selects a winner each year for its Audio-Visual Award. The following guidelines are established.

1. Submissions will not be considered if they endorse a specific product.
2. Those submitting educational material must include a signed copyright agreement granting the Society ownership, if it's selected for the award, and will be included in the ASGE Endoscopic Learning Library.
3. Commercial support for the development of material does not exclude it from consideration for the award. However, the support and potential conflict of interest must be made known to the review committee and should be acknowledged with a single credit line, preferably at the end of the product.

Member Involvement in Society Projects with Financial Implications

Because of the concern that an individual working to develop a Society supported project might be in a situation where a conflict of interest exists, the ASGE requires that a disclosure statement be made. For example, if an individual is developing a computer program for the Society by which gastrointestinal endoscopy is taught through an interactive video program, in which he has a proprietary interest, that individual should complete a disclosure statement.

Conflict of Interest with Other National Medical Organizations or Societies

If a member of the ASGE Governing Board also serves on the governing body of another national medical organization/society, it should be noted in the disclosure statement. Service on the governing body of one society does not necessarily preclude service on another.

Gifts to Physicians From Industry

The American College of Physicians in their position paper entitled, "Physicians in the Pharmaceutical Industry"¹ has written that a "responsible and productive alliance between the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry is unquestionably beneficial to medical progress. However, not all interactions between the two merit unconditional praise." The ASGE believes that its individual members should review their own relationship with industry, (especially those involving proprietary objectives). They may find it of value to read the position paper of the American College of Physicians¹, the American Medical Association², or the statement of the Digestive Disease Week Council³. The ASGE believes that it is the responsibility of each of its members to consider his/her own relationship with industry and it is not the responsibility of the Society to dictate the nature of that relationship. However, a useful criterion in assessing the relationship is "would you be willing to have these arrangements generally known?"

Self Referrals

The AMA Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs has suggested that it may be unethical for physicians to refer patients to a medical facility if the physician (or their family) holds a financial interest in the facility and the facility is outside of the sphere of the physician's medical expertise. The ASGE supports the concept that referrals should be made in an ethical fashion.

References

1. Ann Intern Med 1990; 112:624.
2. JAMA 1991; 265:501.
3. DDW Council. A copy of the statement may be obtained from: DDW Council, c/o Charles B. Slack, Inc., Thorofare, NJ.

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