

Insights to the INEP Position Statement on **CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST AND DISCLOSURE IN EPIDEMIOLOGY**

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CAVEATS

- ▶ This INEP Position Statement was **unanimously approved** by the INEP Board last week, on September 16th, 2020.
- ▶ It is currently a **confidential** document that can be made public only after it is endorsed by at least 50% of INEP's 18 voting member organizations, expected by October 21st, 2020.
- ▶ With INEP's imprimatur, the Position Statement will carry weight. It will be disseminated initially on the INEP website and all 24 INEP member organizations will be encouraged to post it on their websites.

CONTEXT

- ▶ Since the 1980s, when the activities of vested industrial interests to influence regulation and safety hazards were first described, ethics guidelines have evolved for epidemiologists. Epidemiologists are expected to adhere to their professional guidelines in their work.
- ▶ Conflict-of-Interest (COI) is addressed in the ISEE 2012 ethics guidelines. The INEP Position Statement focuses specifically on COI in many, if not all of its dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals and entities who have a Conflict-of-Interest (COI) in conducting, communicating, and using science have been known for centuries.

COI and its effect on science have been documented not only in the application of epidemiology to informing health policy, but also among other branches of science.

The *International Network for Epidemiology in Policy* (INEP) recognizes this and, through its Position Statement on COI, proposes ways to better manage the problem in the public interest.

COI EFFECTS ON SCIENCE

- * Science can be misused either intentionally, through error, or from bias.
- * Intentional distortion and disinformation regarding scientific methods, evidence, and communication are associated with COI.
- * Although developed by the lead industry (early 1900s) and the tobacco industry (since 1950s), COI-associated science tactics have been adopted by industries where self-interest includes financial stakes, liability protection, political interests, as well as other motivations.
- * But, other agencies, academic institutions and non-profits can also have COI issues.

HOW IS COI CREATED IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY?

- * Confidential financial incentives
- * The award of scientific grants and contracts
- * Promises of job security

Who is affected or involved?

- * Individual researchers
- * Scientific journal authors
- * Scientific reviewers
- * Journal editors
- * Corporate sponsors of journals.

HOW DO COI PRACTICES AFFECT EPIDEMIOLOGY?

- Rather than conducting impartial analysis, scientists can produce and disseminate misinformation, and suppress data.
- The association of cause-and-effect can be obscured and denied.
- Scientific integrity can be undermined.
- Public trust can be eroded in the science of epidemiology.
- Workers, the public, and environment can be harmed.

THE INEP LOGO



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK
FOR EPIDEMIOLOGY IN POLICY

Integrity, Equity, and Evidence in Policies Impacting Health

Formerly known as  INTERNATIONAL
JOINT POLICY COMMITTEE
OF THE SOCIETIES OF EPIDEMIOLOGY

WHAT IS INEP AND WHAT IS ITS ROLE?

- INEP is well-positioned internationally to develop strategies to combat the misuse of epidemiologic science.
- INEP is the only global network of epidemiologists with a focus on providing a bridge between epidemiologic research and evidence-based, rational, and government-formulated health policy that serves the public interest.
- INEP provides a unique global forum to protect and promote public health and works to ensure scientific integrity, promote ethical conduct in research, and support evidence-based research findings that are both independent and transparent.

WHAT IS IN THE INEP POSITION STATEMENT?

- * High profile examples on the misuse of epidemiologic research and the failure to disclose COI reported in the media and scientific literature and appendices
- * Recent COI examples developed by INEP co-authors and contributors.
- * A compendium of common practices used to distort and misapply epidemiological sciences
- * INEP recommendations that include guidance and strategies for COI management by Identification, Avoidance, Disclosure, and Recusal.

HOW CAN THE POSITION STATEMENT BE USED?

- * Professional organizations can adopt, update, and monitor COI disclosure protocols and scientific practices for their members; train young scientists to recognize and avoid COI.
- * Scientific community can call out and recognize common practices to distort and misapply epidemiological science.
- * INEP member organizations, academic institutions, and other public health professionals (as well as epidemiologists) can adopt INEP recommendations and strategies for COI management that include **identification, avoidance, disclosure, and recusal**.
- * Ensure scientists fulfil their roles both in informing and protecting the public health.

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DISCLAIMER

PARTICIPANTS AS PER THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

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3. Food Safety Panel
4. 2015 INEP Policy to Avoid COI through Donations

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5. Recent Epidemiology-specific Examples of COI and Disclosure Issues

- a) 2016 CPI COI Exposé: “Science for Sale” on Scientific Boards, Councils, and Review Panels
- b) 2018 Collegium Ramazzini Statement: COI-related Principles for Safeguarding the Integrity of Research in Occupational and Environmental Health
- c) 2019 Commentary: How can the integrity of occupational and environmental health research be maintained in the presence of conflicting interests?
- d) 2019 Acquavella Commentary that COI Disclosure Harms Epidemiology: INEP member response
- e) 2020 Graziosi Article: Political COI of False Hurricane Claims
- f) 2020 Kaplan et al Article: COVID Pandemic Lapses in COI and Disclosure
- g) 2020 INEP Executive Committee Letter: Unbalanced and Conflicted Science in AJPB Special Issue on E-Cigarettes
- h) 2020 Heindel Article: Undeclared COI in Biased Editorial Duplicated in 8 Toxicology Journals
- i) 2020 Hardell, Rivasi, and Buchner Letters / Reports: RF-EMF Hazard and COI of ICNIRP Analyses and Leadership
- j) 2015-2020 Caldwell-Soskolne Analysis of COPE Failure: Articles and Journal COI for Drinking Water Carcinogenicity
- k) COI and Improper Influence through Meeting/Conference Sponsorship by Vested Interests: ISEE Guidelines for Donor Support
- l) 2020 COI and Hill’s 1965 Viewpoints Used in Testimony for Causation in Civil Litigation

MAIN TEXT (Cont.)

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- d. Recusal

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APPENDICES (I – XXVII)

SIZE OF THE DOCUMENT

▶ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2 pages
▶ TABLE OF CONTENTS	3 pages
▶ AUTHORSHIP ...	1 page
▶ FRONT MATTER	7 pages
▶ MAIN TEXT	30 pages
▶ APPENDICES	50 pages

	93 pages

DISCLAIMER

- ▶ Each of the Appendices included in this Position Statement is provided for illustrative purposes only. They were identified through the literature search as well as by the authors and contributors of the Position Statement. Their inclusion as Appendices does not mean that either INEP or the authors of this Position Statement endorse their contents, nor comment on/judge the ability of the source of each Appendix, where applicable, to adhere to their own guidelines.
- ▶ This work is not intended to cast all industry, whether corporate publicly- or privately-owned business, in a negative light or as irrevocably unethical. It is intended to make clear that the mission of industry is often different from the mission of science. Businesses of all types often have profit maximization and shareholder return protection in their articles of incorporation.
- ▶ COI is also a concern among academic institutions and academic scientists, who are motivated by financial and/or career goals. This is not only a problem in industry. Public agencies, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are often required to state lofty, altruistic missions, even the industry serving ones. It thus behooves those concerned about the impartiality of science to scrutinize any underlying motives that could influence science, derailing it from its mission to advance knowledge in the public interest. Different missions and motivations can result in, at best, tensions and, at worst, polarization resulting in inaccurate or distorted science.
- ▶ INEP recognizes that important contributions to public health science have emerged thanks to industry support and engagement. However, there have also been biased industry players that analysis has shown cast doubt and foment uncertainty to deliberately delay policy designed to protect public health, or to otherwise protect their financial and reputational interests. Generally, sectors from among academia, industry (including both public and private business enterprises), government, and NGOs found to have minimal motivation for bias are those that, directly or indirectly, do not accept corporate publicly- or privately-owned business-sponsored research funding or respond to politically or financially imposed pressures. While it is true that anyone from any sector with a vested interest, regardless of the funding source, could be biased, evidence shows that business sector-sponsored research more commonly generates biased science.
- ▶ The goals and potentially positive outcomes of this Position Statement include not only the societal benefits of scientific integrity with respect to advancing knowledge, but also the benefits, both direct and indirect, that protect public health in terms of preventable morbidity and premature mortality. Our purpose in this Statement is thus to shine a light on mechanisms of demonstrated influence and their harmful impact on, respectively, the advancement of science and the protection of the public health.

FINAL STEPS

- ▶ Timing is critical.
- ▶ ISEE is one of the 24 INEP member organizations currently called upon to vote to endorse the Position Statement.
- ▶ A recommendation from the E&P Committee Chair to the ISEE Executive Council might assist them in their decision.
- ▶ A decision before October 21st would be ideal. Later **endorsements** or **abstentions** will be able to be added.



Thank you for your interest in this topic!

Address any questions via e-mail to:

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This PPT presentation will be accessible on my website under **ARCHIVE & LINKS** at

www.colinsoskolne.com