

Conflicts of interest – What can you do when things go wrong?: a case study

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Alternatively:

Do you want the good news
..... or the bad news?



Our processes



1. All GDG members asked to complete a declaration of interests form before first GDG meeting. Explanatory notes sent with form.
2. All declarations of interest checked for conflicts by project manager before first meeting.
3. GDG members asked to declare interests at the beginning of every meeting during guideline development.
4. Declarations of interest published in full guideline.

What happened



An expert in the field of paediatric gastroenterology who was known to have links with a key pharmaceutical company was appointed to the guideline for idiopathic constipation in children as an external advisor (instead of full GDG member).



But. At the final development meeting he voted on key recommendations for the guideline.

Also



One of the GDG members was a very experienced specialist nurse who worked with children with constipation.



But. At a GDG meeting held after stakeholder consultation she declared an interest that the charitable organisation she worked for was part funded by the same key pharmaceutical company.

Anything else?



Another GDG member was also a very experienced specialist nurse who worked with children with constipation.



But. At a GDG meeting held after stakeholder consultation she declared that she had received hospitality from the same key pharmaceutical company.

And just to underline the problem ...



At consultation two stakeholders, including one of the Royal Colleges, commented that there might be a conflict of interest for these GDG members.

What did we do?



Expert advisor. We removed his vote from the voting for key recommendations.



What else did we do?



- *Specialist nurse working for charitable organisation:* Checked extent and nature of this support. Discussed with NICE. This declared non-personal interest was not seen as a conflict of interests and no further action was necessary.

And



- *Specialist nurse who had received hospitality:* This personal pecuniary interest was seen as a conflict of interest so this nurse's votes were also removed from the voting for key recommendations.



Most importantly



All declared interests were checked for accuracy and reported in the full guideline.



Recommendations

- Two recommendations were changed in light of the declared interests in order to make them “softer” and the brand name was replaced by the generic name:

“Use Offer the following oral medication regimen for disimpaction if indicated:

- Movicol Polyethylene glycol 3350 + electrolytes, using an escalating dose regimen (see table 4), as the first-line treatment.”

Responses to stakeholders

Responses were written to comments from stakeholders to explain fully each decision made.



Stakeholder comment and response



- Stakeholder responses were written that explained fully the decisions made and how potential conflicts of interest had been dealt with.



Problems and solutions

1. GDG members did not understand what constituted an interest that needed to be declared.

Solution

Written forms and explanatory notes for declarations of interest are being made simpler. These will be sent for completion prior to first GDG. At interview declarations of interest are explained in simple language and examples given.



Problems 😞 and solutions 😊

2. As a result of this lack of understanding interests that needed to be declared were not discovered until after the development phase of the guideline.

Solution

GDG members are asked to declare their interests at the beginning of each GDG meeting. This is done using simple language and examples.



Problems and solutions

3. There was lack of clarity over what constituted a conflict of interest.

Solution

This has now been clarified with NICE and internal training at the NCC is underway to ensure everyone understands. The difference between a declared interest and a conflict of interests, and what will happen when there is a conflict of interest, is explained at interview and at the first GDG meeting.



Problems and solutions

4. The role of the expert advisor became blurred with that of full GDG member.

Solution

Expert advisors are invited to join for one or two meetings only and their role clearly explained to them and to the GDG when the advisor is present. The fact that expert advisors should not be involved in drafting recommendations or voting at GDG meetings is reinforced.



But



- Will our strict policy about potential conflicts of interest make it difficult to recruit GDG members who are experts in their field?
- It would be good to learn what happens in other countries around the world.

