

## COI Concerns Grow With More Academia-Industry Partnerships

The possibility of financial conflicts of interest (COI) in the research community is ever-present, and, as academia-industry relationships increase, so too the level of concern with financial conflicts.

In June 2005, the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) hosted a conference with the theme *Shared Responsibility, Individual Integrity: Scientists Addressing Conflicts of Interest in Biomedical Research*. Among the issues discussed were risks and challenges to investigators in four types of academia-industry relationships: research contracts, consulting and board membership, entrepreneurial activities, and training or education. Recently, FASEB released a report with the same title.

The focus of both the conference and the report is the role of the investigator in maintaining the integrity of research by avoiding conflicts of interest. As the report points out, while there are rules and policies of the federal government, institutions, professional societies, and scientific journals that guide the oversight of academia-industry relationships, many of the policy recommendations addressing financial conflicts of interest have focused on the role of institutions in the review and oversight of investigators' relationships with industry, but the role of investigators has not been as well-identified.

The report represents a "consensus statement on overarching principles and voluntary standards for the conduct and management of academic-industry interactions from the scientists' perspective." The guiding

framework of the report is based on an assumption that in academia-industry relationships there are

- (1) individual decisions that are made by scientists;
- (2) institutional, professional, and government requirements; and
- (3) goals and objectives specific to each sector.

### Investigators Individually Responsible

The report noted that "approximately one-quarter of academic faculty members receive research funding from industry, representing close to \$2 billion in 2004." In addition to funding direct research projects, corporations can acquire research results by hiring investigators as consultants or placing them on advisory boards.

From the FASEB conference discussions emerged seven challenges and 19 guiding principles to help investigators address the challenges (see box below).

The report's conclusion reinforces its beginning that "investigators are individually responsible for maintaining accountability in their choices' to enter into relationships with industry, complying with institutional, government and journal policies, and taking responsibility to guard against bias in research. The scientific process requires scientists to work within a culture of the highest standards for research and professional conduct, and to identify and manage conflicts of interest as an inherent responsibility of their job. They must, continue to make efforts to provide access to research results and disseminate findings in a timely manner. Finally, they must protect against risks to human research participants and trainees." Link: [http://opa.faseb.org/pdf/FASEB\\_COI\\_paper.pdf](http://opa.faseb.org/pdf/FASEB_COI_paper.pdf).