Author’s response to reviews

Title: Requirements of Health Policy And Services journals for authors to disclose financial and non-financial conflicts of interest: a cross-sectional study

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Author’s response to reviews:

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Rosanna Gonzalez-Mcquire, Editor

Subject: “Requirements of Health Policy and Services journals for authors to disclose financial and non-financial conflicts of interest: a cross-sectional study”
Dear Dr. Gonzalez-Mcquire,

We thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript for your consideration for publication in Health Research Policy and Systems. Your comments and suggestions were very helpful, and we have considered them to improve our manuscript.

Please find on the following pages our detailed point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ suggestions. We will be happy to address any further comments or suggestions you or the reviewers might have.

With kind regards,

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Please note: reviewers’ comments are in bold font, our responses are in regular font and, and extracts from the text are in italic and placed within “quotation marks” with any changes underlined.

Chief Editors

Comment 1:

Please make a slight amendment in relation to Table 1, which is showing Springer as a separate publisher from BMC. Springer announced its takeover of BMC in 2008, and while BMC has separate lists of its journals. Therefore, please either merge the items on the Table, or have a footnote about the fact that they are published by the same company.

Response 1: Thank you for pointing this out. We added a footnote to table 1 as suggested:

“† Springer announced the acquisition of BioMed Central Group (BMC) in October 2008”
Comment 2:

Your reply to Comment 9 from Reviewer #1 is unclear: it seems to suggest that ‘work other than the submitted work’ refers to ‘issues unrelated to that product’. Is this correct?

Response 2: In principle, this could also relate to another study on the same product. It just happened that the one journal that met our answer category of ‘work outside the submitted work’, focused only on ‘issues unrelated to the product being studied. We have edited the text to clarify this point:

“Although most journals’ policies required COI disclosure for the submitted work (87%), only one (2%) required COI disclosure for work other than the submitted work. That one journal specifically asks authors for having “been paid as a consultant (or in a similar capacity) by a company with a vested interest in the product being studied, on issues unrelated to the product being studied.”

Comment 3:

Response to Reviewer #1, comment 12: you have added Table 6, with a suggestion of information journals should request authors to include in their disclosure of COI. While it might not often be relevant for health policy journals (compared to clinical ones) it seems rather detailed. Please have a read of an article by Grant Lewison (who has published with us) (https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flink.springer.com%2Farticle%2F10.1007%2Fs11192-014-1507-0&data=02%7C01%7Cea32%40aub.edu.lb%7Ca55298452eac418ce27508d4da48f693%7Cc7ba5b1a41b643e9a1206ff654ada137%7C0%7C636373454280352991&sdata=ryapff6Lwexls
vuuvEcWHAOiSl%2FsvFzFuqg%2FuA17ns%3D&reserved=0), which in the last few paragraphs makes interesting suggestions about a Central register of COI information that authors could update annually; might this not be a more practical proposal which you might like to or build on? The paper by Lewison et al. mostly looks at another aspect of COI, i.e. how the WoS often mistakenly collects the COI data as being study funding information.

Response 3: thank you for this suggestion. We have replaced ‘should’ with ‘could’ in the following sentence:

“Table 6 provides suggestions for items that journals could include in their policies for authors’ disclosure of COI.”

Also, we have added the following to “Implications for editorial processes” paragraph:

“Although there is little evidence regarding amounts of money that are likely to bias decisions and judgments, it may nevertheless be advisable for journals to ask for more specific details
about financial COIs, including the amount of money involved. Lewison et al. suggested a COI statements registry where authors could declare their competing interests that could be effortlessly followed over time to verify the authors’ declared interest [22]. Requirement for reviewers and the editorial team to disclose their own COIs, and how these are managed represents another major area where policies could be improved (e.g., editors withdrawing from handling manuscripts on which they could be conflicted).”

Comment 4:

In your response to reviewer #3, comment 5, please split the text added because, while most of it is correctly in the methods, surely the final sentence (‘none of these analyses was significant’) should be in the results? Furthermore, we are not quite sure what it is you are asking us regarding adding an Appendix?

Response 4: thank you for bringing this to our attention. We have moved that paragraph to the results section as follows:

“Fifty-four out of the 67 journals’ policies (81%) required at least one form of non-financial COI disclosure. Table 4 provides the descriptors used to refer to non-financial COI for these 54 policies. The top three descriptors that non-financial COI policies required disclosure for were: “personal relationship” (54%), “non-financial COI” (33%) and “professional” (28%). There were no significant associations between the existence of COI disclosure policy and the explicit requirement for financial or non-financial as outcomes and certain determinant factors of the journals’ characteristics such as COPE, ICMJE membership and impact factor. There were no significant associations between the journals’ characteristics such as COPE, ICMJE membership and impact factor and (1) the existence of COI disclosure policy, (2) the explicit requirement for disclosure of financial or (3) the explicit requirement for disclosure of non-financial COI.”

We will not add the tables to the manuscript as an Appendix, as initially suggested.