Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 10 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Nasreen Jessani

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this very interesting and relevant study. I hope that my comments will be helpful to the study team.

Abstract:

Conclusion seems to be more of a summary of findings. Might be more interesting to include some of the discussion points here instead. The "so what" implications.

Background

Page 4 -Line 10: the authors indicate that the IOM report resulted in a surge of COI policies across health organizations but it would be good to know if the IOM report also resulted in a change or introduction of COI policies across health journals (since this is the focus?) Perhaps knowing when these journals introduced or changed their policies and whether they coincide with an important event or report such as above would strengthen the paper. (if there is a way of finding this information and using it as an indicator or proxy indicator) Else it seems a little tangential.

Page 4 -Line 22: Examples of COIs affecting policy making is a very important contribution in this paper. However, the authors fail to provide a strong argument. For instance, they mention "a number of reports" but do not cite all the reports, with only reference to the one from China. More examples or references would be helpful here. Furthermore, the China example could probably be made more succinct to get the main point across.

Page 4 -Line 41: the India example is an interesting one but unlike the China example, we don't see "how" health policies were affected by the identified COIs. This would important as that is the point that the authors are trying to make.

Page 5 - Para 1: The paragraph begins by stating the importance of reviewing evidence impartially for EIPM. But then it goes on to talk about authors and reviewers…there seems to be
a disjunction here…the first sentence is relevant to the policymaking community and the second for scientific community. I understand the link that the authors are trying to make but it needs to be clarified.

Page 5 - line 12: The context of a previous similar study is helpful and very relevant. It would be interesting to note what impact the study had on the clinical journals (if any) with respect to their COI policies. Given that the authors are interested in research for impact, has there been any impact? This would help justify the reasons for the current study as impetus for change rather than traditional academic research on journal COI policy.

Methods

Page 7 - line 10-37: It is not immediately obvious why some of these characteristics of the journals were important to note for the study. The study team obviously had reasons for collecting this information. It would therefore be helpful for the authors to include an additional few words explaining the relevance of these characteristics.

Page 7 - line 17: wasn’t this the journal category you were searching for? Not sure why data on those "other than" this were collected? Clarification here would be helpful.

Results:

Page 9 - Line 39: This statement is rather unclear "…required it for work outside the submitted work"…

Limitations

Are there any biases that may have been introduced by your processes for selection or interpretation?

Are there any possibilities of bias based on the investigators’ personal experiences with journals?

Discussion

Page 12 - Line 15: The phrase" they may suggest that health policy journals are lagging slightly behind" is a bit nebulous. Are they only being compared to the core clinical journals and if so, without a benchmark for what is appropriate COI policy, it would be hard to mark a judgment on what lagging behind means (and to quantify it). Furthermore, its not apparent whether clinical
Journals are also potentially "lagging behind" other disciplines or further ahead. The relative assessment of what constitutes appropriate COI Policy is unclear and therefore a comparison would be unfair. (Nb: the next two paragraphs that make comparisons with other journals are much more convincing on the relative COI policies)

The paper is missing the WHY - Ie why is this all important? Why should journals take heed of COI policies? What if they don't? Should there be a oversight "ethics/IRB" for journals? Why should readers take author and editor COI into consideration when reading an article of research? Journals have so far "got away" with vague or incomplete policies - has the impact of this been so damaging that revisions are critical? And what is an ideal benchmark for all the various COI's that have been suggested? How do the authors suggest that the changes being suggested are implemented? How will the various journals be reached with these results? Besides this being interesting information, what are the plans for this research to have the intended impact?

Conclusion

The conclusion is rather weak and should be revisited.

Minor edits

Background

Line 12: use COI acronym since its already been introduced

Line 17: Replace "the mandate of which" to "whose mandate is"

Page 6 - Line 56: there seems to be a word missing after standardized? The sentence seems fragmented

A copy-edit read through of the grammar throughout the paper for word order etc...(eg line 27: on-pack warnings, "they examined for any relevant emails" etc)

The authors alternate between the first person (our study) and the third person (the investigators). Suggest choosing one or the other to maintain flow and consistency.

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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