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: 27 May 2017

Reviewer: Adam Dunn

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. The authors have examined a set of policy and services journals listed in Web of Science to examine the requirements for disclosing competing interests. The strengths of the work include the detail of the examination, the comparison to core clinical journals, and the transparent presentation of the results. The weaknesses of the work include potential limits of the journals that were selected, and that compliance was not examined as part of the work or examined in comparisons with other literature (journal policy may be very different from journal practice!). In what follows, I have described some comments and suggestions in chronological order.

Major comments:

1. I felt that for a study on primary research, the use of anecdotes in the background didn't match the type of research. The background could have done more to explain why it is important that conflicts of interest are reported in a complete, standardised, and transparent manner.

2. Are there health policy and services journals listed in PubMed and signed up to ICMJE that are not included in Web of Science? If there are, I think PubMed (and perhaps Embase) should have been considered, or this should be listed as a limitation. If the authors are confident that the set of journals is complete, then I could be convinced that this is not a limitation.

3. How did the journals differentiate between funding disclosures (who paid for the work represented in the articles) and declarations of competing interests (do the authors have relationships that could influence their work outside of the work represented in the article)?

4. I might have missed this, but were there results on how the journals handle editor's conflicts of interests and if this policy was public?

5. Did the authors consider examining the relationships between the different characteristics of the journals and the completeness and characteristics of the policies? Are they related to
impact factor? Belonging to ICMJE/COPE? If this is not appropriate for a statistical analysis, can you think of a way to visualise the raw differences in a useful way so readers can quickly see where the main issues are and who is doing it better than others?

Minor comments:

1. Background: The definition of a conflict of interest is fine but I think it would be problematic to use it without explaining what the primary interest of a researcher might be. In some cases, the primary interest is one's own career or the profits of the company they run. We typically assume that the primary interest is set and it relates to the welfare of patients and society but never explicitly state this. When discussing non-financial conflicts of interest, this distinction becomes more important.

2. Results: Out of interest, I would want to know the level of agreement between investigators when extracting information from the journals. Having looked at a large number of actual disclosures recently, I suspect the ambiguity might have made the level of agreement quite low. It would be worth including information about this somewhere.

3. Discussion: As a suggestion only, how does the research relate to any surveys that have examined either (a) the difference between policy and disclosure, and (b) adherence to ICMJE standards by the journals in their disclosures and lack of disclosure by authors?

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English
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