

ESPEN ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY AND DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Under the **ESPEN Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy** (E-ECOIP), all members applying to serve on committees, guideline officers, Editors-in-Chief and Associate Editors of ESPEN Journals must complete the Conflict of Interest (COI) Disclosure Statement, which is included at the end of this document.

PREFACE

Integrity and transparency are fundamental principles that guide all ESPEN actions. ESPEN is committed to ensuring that its decisions and actions are made in the best interests of the Society and are free from undue influence.

COI may be financial (e.g., employment, consultancy, research funding, stock ownership) or non-financial (e.g., personal relationships, academic competition, intellectual beliefs, or institutional affiliations).

A COI exists when a person or organisation has multiple interests, whether financial or non-financial, that could potentially compromise, or be perceived to compromise, the impartiality, objectivity, or independence of their judgment, decisions, or actions^{1,2}.

A COI concerns the potential for influence, not necessarily evidence of actual misconduct.

The existence of a COI does not imply that inappropriate conduct has occurred. Rather, a COI arises whenever personal, professional, or institutional interests could reasonably be perceived as competing with, or influencing, an individual's responsibility to act in the best interests of ESPEN.

A COI may exist whenever an individual is in a position to influence an ESPEN decision or activity that could directly or indirectly affect a company or organisation with which they have a financial, professional, or personal relationship.

ESPEN recognises that COIs are common in scientific and clinical practice and do not necessarily imply bias or diminish the value of an individual's expertise or contribution.

However, identifying, disclosing, and appropriately managing both actual and perceived COI is essential to maintaining the integrity, independence, credibility, and public trust in ESPEN's scientific, educational, and governance activities.

This policy is therefore intended to ensure that potential conflicts are identified, transparently disclosed, and managed in a manner that safeguards the independence and credibility of ESPEN and its activities.

COVERED INDIVIDUALS

The E-ECOIP pertains to all individuals holding the following positions in ESPEN:

1. Members of the Executive Committee,
2. Members of the Scientific Committee,
3. Members of the Educational and Clinical Practice Committee (ECPC), and Associated Members of the ECPC,
4. Editors-in-Chief and Associate Editors of ESPEN publications,
5. Guideline Officers and working group members,
6. Members of the Special Interest Groups of ESPEN,
7. Council members.

¹ COPE <https://publicationethics.org/>

² Romain PL. Conflicts of interest in research: looking out for number one means keeping the primary interest front and center. *Curr Rev Musculoskelet Med*. 2015 Jun; 8(2):122-7.

In addition, speakers and moderators in ESPEN events such as congresses, symposia, courses and workshops should also disclose their COIs at the beginning of their presentations in these events.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

An **ineligible company** is any entity whose primary business is the production, marketing, sale, resale or distribution of healthcare products, including medical nutrition, drugs and other medical devices used by or on patients, including multilevel marketing businesses.

Financial relationships include those of an employee, researcher, consultant, advisor, speaker, independent contractor (including contracted research), recipient of royalties or patent-related income, executive, and owner. Individual stocks and stock options must be disclosed, but diversified mutual funds do not. Research funding from ineligible companies must be disclosed by the principal investigator, even if their institution receives the research grant and manages the funds.

Potential COIs include, but are not limited to:

1. Serving as a paid or unpaid consultant to, or employee of, an ineligible company.
2. Financial relationships with any ineligible company which provides products or services related to clinical nutrition.
3. Receiving support from commercial or other sources related to clinical nutrition.
4. Serving in a fiduciary or leadership role for other organisations.
5. Holding investments (outside of mutual funds) in any entity that deals with ESPEN in any commercial capacity.
6. Direct or indirect interest in, or relationship with, any individual or organisation which ESPEN currently has, or proposes to enter into, a transaction or arrangement involving the sale, purchase, lease or rental of property or other asset, the provision of services, or investments.

Non-financial interests³: This relates to any non-financial professional or personal benefit, or non-financial issue that could affect your perceived objectivity. Examples include:

1. Being an advocate for a particular group or member of a lobbying or pressure group with an interest in health or social care.
2. Holding office or a position of authority in a professional organisation such as a royal college, a charity, or advocacy group.
3. Involvement in an ongoing or scheduled trial or research project aimed at determining the effectiveness of a matter under review.
4. Having published a clear opinion about the matter under consideration.
5. Having authored or co-authored a document submitted as an evidence publication to the relevant ESPEN Journal board.

Indirect interest: It is about circumstances where there is, or could be perceived to be, an opportunity for a third party closely associated with you to benefit.

This could be through another person or organisation having a financial or non-financial interest (as defined above), and potentially benefiting from a decision you may be involved in making through your work on an advisory committee.

³ Adapted from 'International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

This can include:

1. close relatives, close friends, associates and business partners.
2. employers (for example with research grants or other funding).
3. where you are appointed as a committee member to represent an organisation.
4. where you are attending a meeting to speak on an organisation's behalf, or you are making a written submission to the committee on behalf of an organisation.

If a Covered Individual has been nominated by a stakeholder organisation to give evidence to a committee, please use the section "Indirect interest" to declare the nominating organisation's interests relating to the topic. This includes any financial interest the organisation has in the technology or comparator product; funding received from the manufacturer of the technology or comparator product; or any published position on the matter under review.

PROCEDURES

The Executive Committee shall consider all actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest when appointing individuals to ESPEN committees, boards, editorial positions, and other official roles (Covered Individuals).

Management of Conflicts of Interest

It is ESPEN's policy that all Covered Individuals must disclose all actual, potential and perceived COIs, including all relevant financial and non-financial relationships. When a COI exists, the Covered Individual must refrain from participating in discussions, deliberations, decision-making, and voting on any matter related to that conflict.

To ensure the appropriate identification and management of COIs, the following measures shall be implemented:

1. Annual Disclosure

- All Covered Individuals shall complete a COI disclosure form annually from 1st-31st October (Annex 1).
- Disclosures should reflect relationships over the previous 12-month period.
- Covered Individuals have an ongoing obligation to disclose any new actual, potential, or perceived COI as soon as possible and no later than 28 days after the interest arises. Individuals are expected to regularly review their professional activities, financial relationships, and outside interests to identify potential conflicts.
- The Covered Individuals shall submit the COI Disclosure Form to the following e-mail address:
 - General Secretary (Gen.Secretary@espen.org): members of the Executive Committee, Scientific Committee chair, Educational and Clinical Practice Committee (ECPC) chair, Editors-in-Chief of ESPEN Journals, Guideline Officers, Council members.
 - Scientific Committee chair (Scientific.Committee@espen.org): members of the Scientific Committee.
 - Educational and Clinical Practice chair (ECPCCommittee@espen.org): members of the ECPC and Associated Members of the ECPC.

- Editors-in-Chief of ESPEN Journals (espenjournals@espen.org): Associate Editors of ESPEN publications.
 - Chairs of the SIGs of ESPEN will be responsible for collecting the members' COI disclosures.
- The persons responsible for collecting the disclosures shall review them for completeness and refer any uncertainties to the Executive Committee for further review and, where appropriate, determination of any necessary COI management actions, which may include, but are not limited to:
 1. Declaration and recording of the conflict in meeting minutes
 2. Restriction of participation in discussions on specific agenda items
 3. Recusal from deliberations and decision-making processes
 4. Exclusion from voting on affected matters
 5. Limitation or modification of committee or role participation
 6. Requirement to step down from a role where the conflict cannot be appropriately managed
 7. Additional safeguards deemed necessary by the ExeCom to protect independence and transparency.

Covered Individuals who establish a new financial, professional, or employment relationship with an ineligible company during their term of office must disclose the relationship to the Executive Committee as soon as possible and no later than 28 days after the relationship arises. Following review, they may be required to resign or step down from their ESPEN position if the conflict cannot be appropriately managed.

2. Disclosures during meetings

- At the beginning of any discussion involving a matter in which a Covered Individual has an actual, potential, or perceived COI, the individual shall verbally disclose the conflict and provide all relevant information.
- The disclosure shall be recorded in the meeting minutes.

3. Recusal from Discussion and Decision-Making

- A Covered Individual with a COI shall not participate in discussions or decision-making regarding the relevant matter, except to provide factual information or answer questions when requested by the Chair.
- After providing the requested information, the individual shall leave the meeting, whether in person or online, during the discussion and vote.
- The individual shall not attempt to influence the discussion or decision either during or outside the meeting.

4. Role of the Chair

- The Chair shall determine whether additional measures are necessary to ensure an impartial discussion.
- If the Chair is the individual with the potential conflict, the remaining members present shall determine, by majority vote, whether recusal is required.

5. Voting

- A Covered Individual with a COI may be counted for the purpose of establishing a quorum but shall not vote on the matter.
- The individual's recusal and ineligibility to vote shall be documented in the meeting minutes.

6. Absence from Meetings

- If a Covered Individual is unable to attend a meeting at which a matter involving a known COI will be considered, the individual shall disclose the conflict in advance to the President or Chair.
- The Chair shall report the disclosure during the meeting, and it shall be recorded in the minutes.

7. ESPEN Clinical Guidelines

- The Covered Individuals (working group members) shall submit the COI Disclosure Forms to the Guideline Officer (guidelines-office@espen.org). The Guidelines Officer shall use these disclosures to assess the eligibility of guideline panel members, identify any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest, and implement any necessary management measures in accordance with Figure 1 (Annex 2).

8. ESPEN Journals

- The Editors-in-Chief and Associate Editors shall disclose their COIs annually. For manuscript handling, own authorship, recent co-authorship, close institutional or personal relationships, or a direct competing academic interest require reassignment to an independent editor.

9. Participants in ESPEN events

- Speakers in ESPEN events will always display their COIs after the title slide of their presentation. Moderators will communicate their COIs to event organisers. The Professional Congress Organiser working with ESPEN will be in charge of the implementation of this policy.

10. Uncertain Conflicts

- Where it is unclear whether an actual, potential, or perceived COI exists, the individual shall disclose the circumstances to the Gen.Secretary@espen.org, who shall determine whether the policy applies.

11. Failure to Disclose

- Failure to disclose an actual, potential, or perceived COI, or failure to comply with the requirements of this policy, may result in appropriate disciplinary action. The ESPEN Executive Committee shall determine the nature of any such action, taking into account the severity and circumstances of the breach.

Grading of the COI and Recusal and Participation Restrictions

To protect the independence, integrity, and credibility of ESPEN's scientific and educational activities, all Covered Individuals should disclose their COIs annually.

Recusal and participation restrictions will be applied according to the degree of the COI:

- 1. HIGH degree: Employment by an ineligible company or working with companies or organisations that provide services to ESPEN.**

If any of the previous circumstances apply, the Covered Individual is not eligible to serve in any of the following roles:

- Members of the Executive Committee,
- Members of the Scientific Committee,
- Members of the Educational and Clinical Practice Committee (ECPC), and Associated Members of the ECPC,

- Editors-in-Chief and Associate Editors of ESPEN publications,
- Guideline Officers and working group members,
- Members of the Special Interest Groups of ESPEN,
- Council members.

The Covered Individual must refrain from participating in discussions, deliberations, decision-making, and voting on any matter related to the COI.

2. **MODERATE degree:** Activity in an industry-funded advisory board, scientific advisory board or as a reviewer/expert. Management responsibility for solely industry-funded study/studies. Lead responsibility for continuing education with funding coming from a single industry. Regular lecture activity for single companies (several times a year over the last year). Share ownership in individual companies.

If any of the previous circumstances apply, the Covered Individual must refrain from participating in discussions, deliberations, decision-making, and voting on any matter related to the COI.

3. **LOW degree:** Individual lectures funded by industry.

In this case, there is no consequence for the Covered Individual.

4. **Participation in Industry-Sponsored Symposia**

During their term of office, the members of the ESPEN Executive Committee shall not participate as speakers, moderators, or chairs in industry-sponsored symposia held during the ESPEN Congress.

Other ESPEN officers who participate in such symposia should state their ESPEN role and display the following disclaimer, at the beginning of their presentation:

“The opinions and assertions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official policy or position of the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN).”

This restriction is intended to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest and to preserve the independence and credibility of ESPEN leadership.

ANNEX 1.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY COMPLIANCE AND DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

- ☐ I have read and understand the ESPEN Conflict of Interest Policy and agree to abide by all of its terms.
- ☐ I will complete this statement each year of my service to ESPEN and submit amendments during the year if applicable.
- ☐ I understand that I am not to participate in any decision or vote on an issue in which I may have conflicts of interest, and that my disclosures will not preclude service to ESPEN, except where required by continuing education accrediting bodies or ESPEN policy.

Disclosures should reflect relationships over the previous 12-month period.

- ☐ I have nothing to disclose
- ☐ I disclose the following (attach an additional sheet if necessary)

FINANCIAL INTERESTS		
Company name	Date arose	Detail of interest/relationship

-

NON-FINANCIAL INTERESTS		
Company name	Date arose	Detail of interest/relationship

-

INDIRECT INTERESTS		
Company name	Date arose	Detail of interest/relationship

Declaration

I confirm that the information provided above is complete and correct. I acknowledge that any changes in these declarations during my service with ESPEN must be notified to Gen.Secretary@espen.org, as soon as possible and no later than 28 days after the interest arises.

- ☐ I **do** give my consent for this information to be published in registers maintained by ESPEN
- ☐ I **do not** give my consent for this information to be published in registers maintained by ESPEN. If consent is **NOT** given, please state reasons (please note this will be approved only in exceptional circumstances):

Enter text here.

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ANNEX 2.

Figure 1. Decision-making algorithm for assessing conflicts of interest and their resulting consequences for authors in the ESPEN guidelines. Modified from the regulatory framework for guidelines of the AWMF (German Working Group of Scientific Medical Societies).

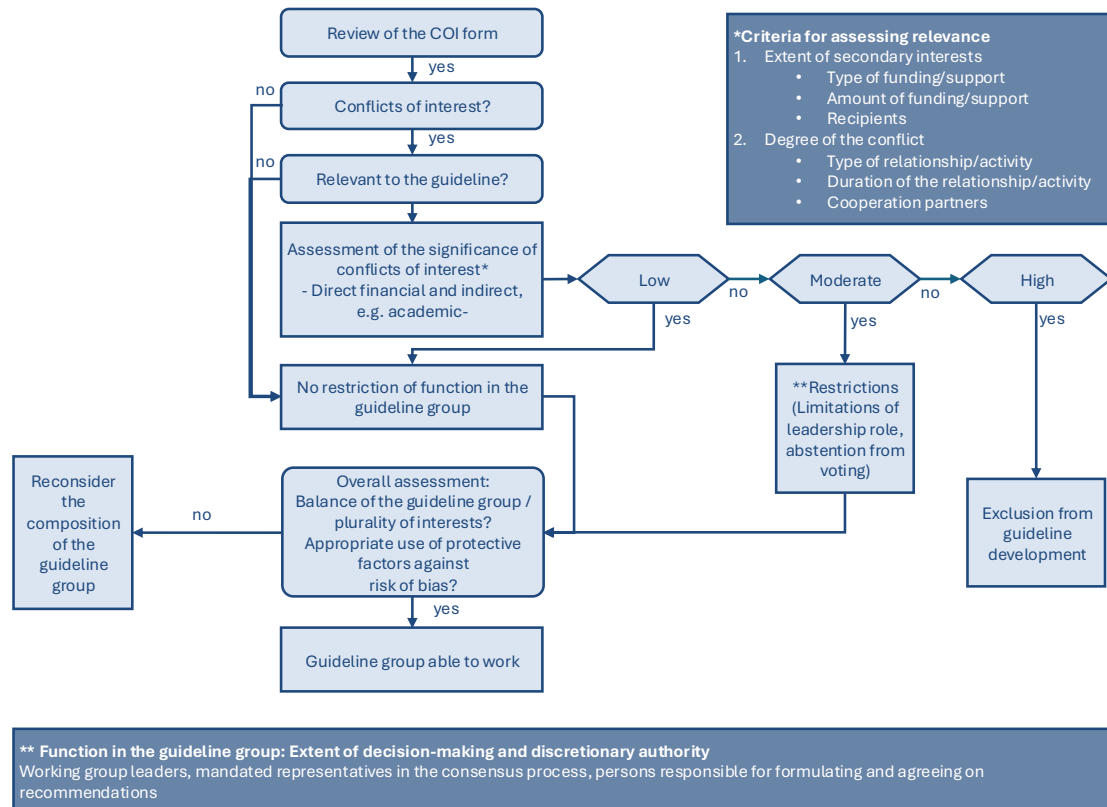


Table 1. Definitions of the degree of conflict of interest as modified after the AWMF guideline framework*

Degree of conflict of interest (last year)	Circumstances for this category	Consequence
None	–	–
Low*	Individual lectures funded by industry	None
Moderate*	- Activity in an industry-funded advisory board/scientific advisory board or as a reviewer/expert - Management responsibility for solely industry-funded study/studies - Lead responsibility for continuing education with funding coming from a single industry - Regular lecture activity for single companies (several times a year over the last year) - Share ownership in individual companies	If possible, no working group chair, and no voting on thematically relevant recommendations or double voting procedure
High*	- Employment in industry - Major share ownership in individual companies	Exclusion from guideline development
* Assessed with regard to financial conflicts of interest: personal payments as well as institutional funding with decision-making responsibility.		

Table 2. Persons responsible for assessing conflicts of interest according to the AWMF*

The assessment of the disclosures is based on determining whether conflicts of interest exist, whether there is a thematic connection to the guideline as a whole and/or in relation to specific issues, and on evaluating the relevance of conflicts of interest as low, moderate, or high, taking into account the potential extent of the resulting conflict, the role of the affected person within the guideline group, and protective factors.

Proposed procedure for ESPEN guidelines: The disclosures are reviewed by the ESPEN Guideline Officers. In the event of any discrepancies, the ESPEN Executive Committee is consulted.

* <https://www.awmf.org/regelwerk/erklaerung-von-interessen-und-umgang-mit-interessenkonflikten> [website in German]