

## Conflicts of Interest Policy

### 1. Definition

A voting director or council member of the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties (UCNS) has a conflict of interest if the director or council member has a private interest that may interfere with the director or council member's official UCNS responsibilities.

### 2. Importance

Conflicts of interest are a matter of concern for the UCNS because directors or council members with conflicts of interest may appear to be less than impartial in their official capacities. Directors and council members have a fiduciary duty to exercise impartial judgments for the best interests of the UCNS. The presence of a private interest may impair their ability to exercise competent judgment and be objective in their official UCNS capacity. A perceived conflict also diminishes the confidence of medical professionals and the public in the UCNS.

### 3. Examples

Conflicts of interest to which this policy pertains include, but are not limited to, these examples:

- a. The director or council member is in a leadership position in an organization seeking membership as a Neurological Subspecialty Area (NSA) or Independent Board.
- b. The Board of Directors develops appeal processes to the Board in accordance with the bylaws, and a board member or council member has a personal or business relationship with the appellant.
- c. A director or council member is asked to pass judgment on a program that may be in the same location and may therefore be competitive with his/her program.
- d. A director or council member is involved with the teaching of board review educational offerings or board review publications of any type.

### 4. Resolution of Conflicts

Conflicts of interests can be resolved or lessened through several strategies.

- a. Avoidance. Serious conflicts should be avoided altogether by directors or council members by not participating in their role as director or council member when there is a significant conflict of interest, and/or not participating in situations in which there is a significant conflict.
- b. Withdrawal. Directors or council members with significant conflicts wishing to remain directors or council members can divest the conflicting interest or withdraw from the conflicting relationship.

- c. Disclosure. Directors or council members with potential conflicts should disclose them fully to the Board of Directors. Disclosure does not eliminate the conflict but mitigates it insofar as it permits others to become aware of the conflict, to monitor the director or council member’s performance, and to consider its effect when interpreting the director or council member’s official judgments. Disclosure is the appropriate remedy for mitigating most instances of conflicts of interest, though at the discretion of the Board, a director or council member may be asked to reclude himself/herself from the debate and/or from the vote on that particular issue.

**5. Disclosure Statement of Conflict of Interest**

Disclosure of conflicts of interest to the Board of Directors is an ethical responsibility of the director or council member having the conflict. The Board of Directors has the ultimate responsibility of determining what limitations or actions may be necessary to protect the UCNS. If a director or council member is uncertain whether a conflict of interest exists, it is better to err on the side of disclosure.

At the beginning of each member’s term of service on the Board of Directors or Council of the UCNS, the director or council member must complete an approved disclosure form. The individual submitting the form must update the form annually and when a change in personal circumstances causes the previously-submitted disclosure to be no longer correct.

**6. Administrative Review and Action on Disclosure Statements**

The following table explains who is responsible for promptly reviewing submitted conflict of interest disclosure statements:

Individuals Submitting Disclosure Statements	Reviewing Authority
Board of Directors	Chair, Board of Directors
Chair, Board of Directors	Board of Directors
Executive Director	Chair, Board of Directors
Council Chair	Chair, Board of Directors
Council Member	Council Chair
Consultant	Executive Director

The Reviewing Authority can take one of three possible courses of action with respect to each statement in which a conflict is acknowledged:

- a. There is no serious conflict. No action, short of appropriate disclosure, must be taken. This is the most common action.
- b. There is a serious conflict. Either the director or council member must be removed from the Board or Council or the director or council member must divest the conflicting interest or withdraw from the conflicting relationship. Disclosure alone is insufficient to handle the conflict.
- c. There is an intermediate conflict. The presence of such a conflict is compatible with concurrent membership on the Board of Directors or Councils and the conflicting interest or relationship. The Board of Directors should carefully monitor the conflict and act as and when it deems necessary.

## **7. Organizational Conflicts with Industry and Institutions**

A complex set of conflicts may accompany relationships of the UCNS as a whole with private industry and other institutions. This policy seeks to recognize and protect the benefits of these relationships while avoiding conflicts of interest that may arise. To reduce possible conflicts of interest, all such relationships should be bound by the following principles:

- a. Gifts from industry or organizations should be made as unrestricted grants. The Board of Directors must specifically approve any conditions or restrictions associated with a grant.
- b. The UCNS should make full disclosure of any grant or other financial relationships.
- c. The UCNS must retain full control over the methods used to acknowledge grants or gifts.

Policy History:

Approved by the UCNS Board of Directors

June 2004

March 1, 2008

Policy History:

Unanimously approved by the Board of Directors on December 26, 2008 (e-mail vote; documented as an addendum to the minutes of the October 3, 2008).

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