



The bone & soft tissue cancer charity

Conflict of Interest and the Research Advisory Committee

1. Definition

- a. A conflict of interest is defined as any financial, personal, professional or institutional interest or connection of any individual Research Advisory Committee (RAC) member which may, if undeclared, expose the RAC and its recommendations open to accusations of bias and inappropriate influence in peer review or assessment, funding recommendations or scientific advice to Sarcoma UK.
- b. The notion of “conflict of interests” does not imply an immoral action. Conflicts may arise out of the facts and not from fraudulent motivations. They do not in themselves inevitably cause harm; it is ambiguity and the *possibility* for harm that arouse concern.
- c. RAC members are not required to declare all associations they may have outside grant giving functions of Sarcoma UK, only those which relate to or could impact on the activities of the RAC. Individuals should register all relevant interests and should declare any relevant interest when dealing with or discussing a matter to which it is pertinent.
- d. Relevant interests may include both financial and non-financial interests. The test of relevance is whether the interest might reasonably be thought to affect the way in which an individual discharges his or her duties. The test is not whether an individual’s actions will be influenced by the interest but *whether the public might reasonably think that this may be the case*.
- e. It is up to each individual RAC member to decide whether a conflict of interest could exist and, if so, to declare the conflict. When deciding on such matters, consideration must be given to how things could appear to others and, in all cases, individuals should err on the side of caution, declaring an interest if there is any possibility that a conflict of interest may exist.
- f. All RAC members must submit a Declaration of Conflicts of Interest each year to Sarcoma UK, declarations will be sought by and submitted to the RAC Chairman.

2. Identification and resolution of conflicts of interest.

- a. Potential conflicts of interest highlighted by declarations of interest, including consultancies and appointments, can be resolved by:
 - i. the individual(s) concerned being excluded from the relevant (or entire) decision making discussion.
 - ii. restricting access to information to the individual(s) concerned.

3. Examples of conflicts:

- a. **Financial conflict:** anyone who has a direct or indirect financial interest with a grant application submitted to Sarcoma UK.
- b. **Applicant and co-applicant(s) conflict:** anyone listed as main applicant or co-applicant on a grant application submitted to Sarcoma UK.

- c. **Collaborator(s) conflict:** anyone listed as a collaborator or having recently collaborated with the listed main applicant and/or co-applicant(s) in a grant application submitted to Sarcoma UK
- d. **Same institution conflict:** anyone working in the same institution as the main applicant or co-applicant(s) listed on a grant application submitted to Sarcoma UK at the time of his/her commitment to the RAC.
- e. **Competition conflict:** anyone who has competitive interest with a grant application being reviewed in Sarcoma UK's Peer Review process that may result in a strong decision bias during the time of his/her commitment to the RAC.
- f. Other conflicts of interests will inevitably arise with individual agenda items. One example where an application is received that turns out to be similar to one in preparation by a RAC member. In such a case the conflict must be declared to the RAC secretariat as soon as it becomes evident.

4. Automatic exclusion from participation in funding decisions

- a. Individuals must absent themselves from the relevant part of any meeting where matters concerning a grant proposal with which they are connected are discussed. They may not take part in any decisions taken in relation to such a grant proposal, and under certain circumstances may not receive any papers relating to it.
- b. An individual is deemed to have such a connection when they are:
 - i. the sole applicant
 - ii. a joint applicant or a named collaborator
 - iii. a relative of one of the grant applicants
 - iv. a business partner of one of the applicants
 - v. a member or employee of the same university or institution as one of the grant applicants

5. Exclusions at Sarcoma UK's discretion

- a. Individuals may be excluded from RAC discussions at the discretion of Sarcoma UK when
 - i. They are a direct competitor of the applicant.
 - ii. They have acted as an external referee or served on another Committee in respect of a proposal when it was considered by another funding body.
- b. If an individual becomes aware of any other matter that would reasonably be expected to give rise to or be viewed as a conflict of interest (whether academic, scientific, financial or personal) then they should declare the matter to the secretariat before the meeting or as soon as the potential conflict becomes apparent at the meeting.
- c. The secretariat, or where there is doubt the secretariat in consultation with the Chair, will determine whether the individual should:
 - i. take a full part in the meeting.
 - ii. be permitted to comment on the application and take part in the discussions but not present the application to the RAC.
 - iii. be permitted to comment on the application and participate in discussions but not take part in the decision.
 - iv. absent him/herself from the relevant part of the meeting.

- d. The secretariat should bring to the Chair's attention all relevant information concerning any form of connection between an application and a member of the committee.

6. Cases of uncertainty

- a. If an individual is in any doubt as to the relevance of an interest that he or she has, such an interest should be disclosed to the secretariat before the meeting or, if not practicable, as soon as the potential conflict becomes apparent at the meeting. The secretariat will consult as necessary and the Chair or the Deputy Chair where the Chair has conflicts shall make a decision by reference to the bullets above.

7. Matters other than those concerning funding decisions

- a. Routinely, individuals must absent themselves from the relevant part of any meeting where matters concerning their interests are discussed and may not take part in any decisions taken relevant to such interests.

8. Discussion of applications outside meetings

- a. Where RAC members feel it necessary to discuss an application prior to the meeting this should be declared to the Chair.
- b. If an individual is approached by an applicant for advice on an application the individual may provide such advice but must disclose this fact to the secretariat. The individual may be excluded from all or part of the meeting at which the application is considered.

9. Raising concerns about the conflicts of interest of others

- a. An individual who is concerned about another individual's potential or actual conflicts of interest should raise the matter as set out below:
 - i. Issue concerning an RAC member should be raised with the Chair or the secretariat.
 - ii. Issues about Sarcoma UK staff should be raised with the Chair.
 - iii. Issues about the Chair should be raised with the Board.