



## AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CYTOPATHOLOGY POSITION STATEMENT

### AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE DEVELOPMENT

Every year numerous high impact scientific studies are published in the medical literature that can affect healthcare decisions. Frequently, differences in the design and methodology of the studies result in contradictory findings, making the evidenced-based decisions difficult for practicing physicians. Hence, healthcare providers often rely on the practice guidelines developed by medical professional societies to standardize diagnostic and treatment strategies. Many factors can influence the development of reliable clinical recommendations. The potential for undue industry influence on medical research and clinical practice guideline development has been the subject of much debate. The National Academy of Medicine (formerly Institute of Medicine) has recommended standards for developing trustworthy guidelines on the following eight subjects: transparency, management of conflict of interest (COI), group composition, systematic review of evidence, grading strength of recommendations, articulation of recommendations, external review, and updating. While financial relationship with industry is the most concerning conflict of interest in medical research and guideline development, other factors including institutional, professional and intellectual conflicts also may affect the outcome.

The American Society of Cytopathology endorses the National Academy of Medicine recommendations and encourages practice guideline developing societies to strictly follow its standards. In particular, funding for guideline development must be completely transparent. Groups that develop clinical practice guidelines should not accept direct funding from medical product companies and should exclude individuals with significant COI from guideline developing panels. At times such panels would not be able to optimally perform their tasks without the expertise of individuals with potential COI. In such circumstances it would be essential to minimize the number of panel members who have a COI and preclude such members from voting on topics in which they have a financial interest. The panel chair should be completely without COI. All members of the group, as well as all ad hoc advisors must be required to publicly disclose any and all potential conflicts of interest.

#### References:

- Institute of Medicine. *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2009
- Institute of Medicine. *Clinical Practice Guidelines We Can Trust*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2011

*Approved by the ASC Executive Board, November 2018*