

3/4/2019

American Thoracic Society
Policy on Conflict of Interest Management of Patient and Family Education
Materials and Programs

I. Purpose:

- A. Provide assurance to patients, family members, the public, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders of the scientific rigor and independence of American Thoracic Society (ATS) patient and family education;
- B. Provide a means for the ATS to collaborate with commercial entities interested in supporting ATS patient and family education, while still ensuring that its planning and content has no commercial bias.

II. Disclosure by Authors and Reviewers:

- A. Authors and reviewers of ATS patient and family education programs (content) must disclose, in the manner required, all commercial interests that may be relevant to their official ATS activities, including 1) all professional or personal financial relationships with companies that have business interests relevant to content, and 2) all intellectual properties (i.e., patents, patents pending, copyrights, and trademarks) relevant to content.
- B. Author and reviewer disclosures will not typically be noted on ATS patient and family education materials.
- C. Materials will state: "Authors and reviewers of American Thoracic Society patient and family education materials are required to disclose all professional and personal financial interests that may be relevant to the content of authored or reviewed materials. Commercial interests do not influence program development, and all content is reviewed to ensure that it is free of commercial bias."

III. Management of Author and Reviewer Conflicts of Interest:

- A. Having a professional or personal relationship with a commercial entity that has business interests in a specific topic does not automatically exclude a person from participating in program development on the topic.
- B. However, it may cause the ATS to require conditions for participation, such as recusal from decision-making, writing, or editing about a specific topic, to assure that the content is developed independently and free of commercial bias. Specific requirements are determined by ATS Patient and Family Education Committee leadership after consultation with the ATS staff responsible for patient education development and conflict of interest management.

IV. Involvement of Commercial Entities and Products:

- A. Funding by commercial entities such as pharmaceutical and medical device companies, and the knowledge of scientific experts in those companies, can be beneficial to the development, dissemination, and implementation of ATS patient and family education. The ATS welcomes such support while recognizing that patients and other stakeholders must be assured that ATS patient and family education is independent, scientifically rigorous, and free from commercial bias.
- B. Commercial funding or in-kind support of ATS patient and family education materials must be restricted to the development of material for a specific topic, either contractually or through a charitable donation or educational grant. Regardless of the method of funding, a supporting company or its agents cannot: propose specific experts to serve as authors, editors, or reviewers of content; recommend specific content (except as noted in “IV.C” below); receive or review content (except in rare occasions when requested by ATS patient and family education staff specifically, e.g., if a technical question about the supporting company’s product that cannot be answered sufficiently otherwise); discuss a material’s development or content directly with authors or others prior to publication.”
- C. Supporting companies and their agents can inform ATS staff of patient information and resources that the supporting company thinks may be beneficial to ATS-developed patient and family education. All content will be reviewed by the ATS staff responsible for the management of patient and family education development and conflicts of interest respectively, and by the program’s editors, authors, reviewers, the Patient and Family Education Committee, and Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee where needed. All content must be free of commercial bias. Final decisions about acceptance and use by ATS of information and resources suggested by supporting companies or others will be made by the ATS.
- D. Supporting companies will be acknowledged in ATS patient and family education programs and materials, and in ATS promotion of such when appropriate, by company name and/or logo in a manner determined by the ATS.
- E. ATS patient and family education materials should not include references or links to specific company programs, websites or social media. Identifying diagnostic or treatment drugs or devices by brand name rather than generic name may occur when necessary to ensure that patients and families recognize the drug or device category being discussed. When a brand name is to be used, the brand names of all comparable and clinically acceptable products should be cited in an equitable manner. All ATS patient and family education materials must state that “The ATS does not endorse specific diagnostic or treatment products for patients or their families, or receive revenue from their sale and use, and any references herein have not been influenced by any commercial interest.”

F. All questions by supporting companies or others about ATS patient and family education should be directed to the ATS patient and family education staff, who will inform and be advised by one or more of the following: content editors, authors, reviewers, the Patient and Family Education Committee, and relevant other ATS committees, scientific assemblies, and staff as appropriate. Final decisions will be made by the ATS exclusively.

V. Involvement of Other Parties:

A. Any involvement of other parties (i.e. “third-parties”) in the development of ATS patient and family education development requires approval of ATS patient and family education leadership to assure scientific rigor and freedom from commercial influence. Examples of third-parties that may participate when approved are medical communication firms, other designers or writers, meeting planners, non-ATS publications and media, and nonprofit organizations, such as member organizations of the ATS Public Advisory Roundtable, other patient groups, medical institutions, and government agencies.

B. It is preferred that medical communication firms and other firms engaged in the development of an ATS patient and family education program not have an existing financial relationship with a company that has provided financial or in-kind support to ATS for the development of the program, for purposes relevant to the content of that program. All such firms must keep the content of ATS program development confidential and ensure that it is free of commercial bias.

VI. Use of Content and Resources Developed by Non-Commercial Organizations:

ATS may use patient and family education programs, materials, and resources developed by other non-commercial organizations or institutions, when permitted. All content will be reviewed by the ATS staff responsible for the management of patient and family education development and conflicts of interest respectively, and by the program’s editors, authors, reviewers, and the Patient and Family Education Committee where needed. All content must be free of commercial bias. Final decisions about acceptance and use by ATS of information and resources developed by non-commercial organizations will be made by the ATS exclusively.