

# Responsible Conduct of Research

Conflict of Interest

# Conflict of Interest

- COI issues are fundamental to the issue of “trust”
  - Do you trust research sponsored by drug companies?
  - Do you trust statements on the internet when they are trying to sell you something?
- Basically where a person’s personal interests conflict with professional responsibilities

Footnote: much of this work is derived and synthesized from materials provided at the UNH RCR site:

<https://rit.sr.unh.edu/training/rcr-training/conflict-of-interest.html>

# Conflict of Interest

- Faculty must complete a form on this to disclose real or perceived financial or personal interests relevant to grants
- One of keys is to realize that humans are always dealing with conflicting interest (e.g., time demands). A major point of distinction is that the existence of a conflict does not necessarily lead to unethical or irresponsible behavior.

# When COI becomes problematic

- Falsifying data
- Giving overly harsh review of competitor's manuscript to gain advantage for your research program
- Giving overly favorable review of a grant where you (or family member, or former student) are likely to be paid later as a consultant
- Withholding negative results to ensure a drug makes it to market

# Case Study - Autism

- Although Wakefield did not claim to have proved that the M.M.R. vaccine (typically given to children at 12 to 15 months) caused autism, his concerns, not his caveats, ricocheted around the world. His belief, based on a paper he wrote about 12 children, is that the three vaccines, given together, can alter a child's immune system, allowing the measles virus in the vaccine to infiltrate the intestines; certain proteins, escaping from the intestines, could then reach and harm neurons in the brain. Few theories have drawn so much attention and, in turn, so much refutation: a 2003 paper in *The Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, which reviewed a dozen epidemiological studies, concluded that there was no evidence of an association between autism and M.M.R., and studies in peer-reviewed journals since have come to the same conclusion. In Britain, the General Medical Council revoked Wakefield's medical license after a lengthy hearing, citing numerous ethical violations that tainted his work, like failing to disclose financing from lawyers who were mounting a case against vaccine manufacturers. *The Lancet*, which published the original Wakefield paper, retracted it. In a series that ran early this year, *The British Medical Journal* concluded that the research was not just unethically financed but also "fraudulent" (that timelines were misrepresented, for example, to suggest direct culpability of the vaccine).
- [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/magazine/mag-24Autism-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=3&](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/magazine/mag-24Autism-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=3&)

# Conflict of Interest

- Potential
  - Real
  - Perceived
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- Role of disclosure
  - Precautionary actions