Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program

Conflict of Interest Policy for Cooperative Group Phase 3 Clinical Trials

Background

Financial conflicts of interest in research, as a result of financial relationships and the financial interests they create, may affect the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Consideration has been given to identify possible actions to be taken to protect human research subjects from an investigator's conflict of interests.

The Department of Health and Human Services has recommended investigators consider the potential effect an investigator's financial relationship with an industry sponsor could have on a clinical trial and suggests actions to mitigate the potential effect of the conflict, one of which is including information about the investigator's conflict in the informed consent form.

It is the recommendation of the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program (CTEP) and the intent of this policy to ensure those involved in development and analysis of CTEP-sponsored clinical trials do not have financial interests potentially affecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects therefore obviating the requirement for informed consent disclosure. In order to avoid placing the names of individuals in the model consent form for CTEP-sponsored Cooperative Group studies, the following policy has been adopted as the ethical floor for each Cooperative Group.

Policy

a) Public Health Service (PHS) Policy – De minimus Threshold

CTEP intends to use the PHS conflict of interest policy regarding interests requiring disclosure as the de minimus value and defines such interests related to the investigator, their spouse and dependent children as follows: salary, royalty and other payments for services greater than $10,000 per year (not including salary or payments from public or nonprofit entities); equity interests worth more than $10,000 per year and more than a 5% ownership interest in a single entity. Income and interests less than $10,000 per year do not have to be disclosed. (Title 42, Subpart F, Sec. 50.603)

b) Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Policy – Maximum Threshold

CTEP intends to follow the FDA's conflict of interest policy regarding interests requiring disclosure as the maximum threshold above which an investigator cannot be involved in the development and management of a clinical trial. The FDA defines such interests related to the investigator, spouse and dependent children as follows: payments from sponsor in excess of $25,000 per year during the research and for one year after, not including research compensation; any financial arrangement in which value of compensation could be influenced by outcome of the study; equity interest in a publicly traded company sponsor exceeding $50,000 a year during time of research and one year after; and any significant interest in non-publicly traded company whose value cannot be readily determined referencing public prices. [21 CFR 54.2 (f)]

c) American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Policy

ASCO has developed a stringent conflict of interest policy; however it has exempted National Institutes of Health (NIH)-sponsored clinical trials because "NIH-sponsored trials feature sufficient safeguards to ensure objectivity and independent review of safety and other data developed in the trials." (JCO, Vol 21, No 12 (June 15), 2003: pp 2387-2393) CTEP supports ASCO's policy which acknowledges the processes for clinical trial development and monitoring have been designed to eliminate the possibility of one individual possessing significant influence potentially resulting in personal benefit.

CTEP proposes that financial interests above de minimus value and below the FDA standard be disclosed to the Cooperative Group and included in the Central Institutional Review Board (CIRB) Application. The financial conflicts of interest whose value falls between the two identified thresholds should be managed by the Group.

If the Group believes that an individual's conflict of interest, with value falling between the two identified thresholds, should not disqualify her/him from a leadership position in the study, then the Group should submit a Conflict of Interest Management Plan accompanying the CIRB Application. The management plan should discuss the general elements that pertain to assuring unbiased data collection and review in Group trials including the following:

- Independent review of study by Cooperative Group beyond Disease Committee
- Independent review by NCI/CTEP
- Independent review by a Data and Safety Monitoring Board
- Statistical management of data independent of study chair
- Any additional measures proposed by the Group.

The CIRB will be asked to comment on this Conflict of Interest Policy for Cooperative Group Phase 3 Clinical Trials and add three questions to the CIRB Application as follows: 1) Does the Study Chair or any principal involved in the development or coordination of this study have any significant financial conflicts of interest as defined in the Conflict of Interest Policy for Cooperative Group Phase 3 Clinical Trials? 2) If so, does the Cooperative Group have a management plan in place to address the conflicts disclosed in question #1? 3) If so, a copy of the Management Plan should be attached.

In recognition of the safeguards from financial conflicts of interest provided to human subjects throughout the study continuum by the Cooperative Group and NCI review processes outlined above, the current system does not permit an individual to influence a trial potentially resulting in personal benefit. Therefore placing the names of individuals in the model consent form for CTEP-sponsored Cooperative Group studies is not warranted.