Public availability and scope of publication policies

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Communication of industry-sponsored research is coming under increasing scrutiny

- Codes of conduct, such as Good Publication Practice,\(^1\) provide clear guidance on expected standards in medical publications

- Individual companies releasing their medical publication policies into the public domain is believed to enhance ethical best practice
  - 2009: four of 20 pharmaceutical companies had publicly available policies\(^2\)
  - 2014: in a survey of ISMPP members, 38% of industry and 35% of medical communications agency employees were aware of their company having made their publication policy externally available\(^3\)

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Objectives and methodology

• Validate the findings of the ISMPP survey by retrieving publicly available publication policies and assessing their scope

• Web-based search performed with pre-specified terms to retrieve publication policies from 20 industry and 20 medical communication agency sources

• Policies examined against pre-defined audit question (Table 1)

| Table 1. Policy audit questions |
|---------------------------------
| 1. Does the policy cite professional body publication guidelines or codes of practice (as listed in GPP2)? |
| 2. Is the ICMJE definition of authorship included in the policy?  
  • Does the policy recommend medical/scientific writers to be acknowledged? |
| 3. Does the policy define what a publication is? |
| 4. Does the policy outline guidance on specific types of publications?  
  • If ‘Yes’, what types of studies/publications are supported?  
  • If ‘Yes’, where will the results be reported? |
| 5. Does the policy outline guidance on the transparency of reporting study results (including negative results)? |
| 6. Does the policy include a time limit for submission?  
  • If ‘Yes’, what is the target time limit? |
| 7. Does the policy state a commitment to publishing in peer-reviewed journals? |
Companies with publicly available publication policies

- Publication policies accessible from 65% of Industry and 25% of Agency websites. Notable increase on 2009 figure (20% of top 20 pharma companies)\(^1\)

- 17 of 20 pharma companies included in both studies. Of these, 24% had public policies in 2009 vs. 71% in our study

Of the 18 publication policies identified, 15 (83%) cited an external medical publication professional body, publication guideline or code of practice – ICMJE recommendations were most widely cited in both Industry and Agency polices.

* As listed in GPP23, see reference for details. AMWA = American Medical Writers Association; EQUATOR = Enhancing the Quality and Transparency Of health Research; GPP2 = Good Publication Practice 2; ICMJE = International Committee of Medical Journal Editors; IFPMA = International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations; ISMPP = International Society for Medical Publication Professionals; PhRMA = Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.
Overall scope of publication policies retrieved

- Guidance on specific types of publications: Agency (80%), Industry (92%)
- Commitment to peer-reviewed publication: Agency (80%), Industry (85%)
- Commitment to transparent reporting of study results: Agency (40%), Industry (77%)
- Time limit for submission stated: Industry (54%), Agency (0%)
Study types specified within the scope of industry policies identified
Publication types specified to be peer-reviewed

The majority of policies stated a commitment to peer-reviewed publication for congress activities and primary manuscripts.
Conclusions

- Increase since 2009 in the number of pharmaceutical companies making their publication policy externally available on their website
- Scope of policies varied, but the majority cited an external medical publication professional body, publication guideline or code of practice
- Our findings will help with developing and updating future publication policies and contribute to greater transparency