
PART 3

The Regulatory
Environment for
Science: Conflict-of-
Interest Issues

In the past five years, the United States has seen tremendous growth in biomedical research funding as well as commercialization of that research. As the boundaries between non-profit academic research and the for-profit research industry blur, concerns are raised regarding conflicts of interest (financial and otherwise) on the part of researchers and institutions alike. Part 3 offers three chapters discussing the current responsibilities of those involved in biomedical research regarding conflicts of interest.

Anne Dievler of the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) opens this Part in Chapter 9 with her summary of a GAO review of financial conflicts of interest at academic institutions. The GAO was asked to examine how academic research institutions managed investigators' and institutions' conflicts of interest, and how this affected the safety of human research subjects. After conducting case studies at five institutions, the GAO found sound policies in place, as well as a desire by the institutions for more information about best practices.

In Chapter 10, Virginia Ashby Sharpe describes her work with the Integrity in Science project at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Sharpe believes transparency through public disclosure is a requirement for managing conflict-of-interest issues and curbing abuses in the conduct of scientific research. She urges researchers to take this advice to heart and to let science be used to serve the public interest.

In Chapter 11, independent consultant Bert Spilker gives an industry perspective on conflicts of interest. Spilker stresses the importance of the difference between conflict of interest and bias, and states that we should "not seek to eradicate all conflicts of interest but to eliminate biases from influencing research results." He presents problems and solutions involved in managing biases in research and its results.

