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## Empirical Research on Conflict of Interest: A Critical Look

**Prof Dr Michael Davis, Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago (USA)**

On April 28, 2009, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies, USA, issued a report, *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice*. At 353 pages, it is probably the most extensive official analysis of conflict of interest in any profession. It includes seven appendices. One, Appendix D, is entitled "How Psychological Research Can Inform Policies for Dealing with Conflicts of Interest in Medicine". Its author, Jason Dana, teaches psychology at University of Pennsylvania. The appendix is a survey of empirical research related to conflict of interest generally, with an emphasis on research relevant to medicine. Though not all the researchers are psychologists, the research is all psychological insofar as it is concerned with non-rational processes of individuals, especially those processes that are not conscious. In another respect, though, most of the research is not psychological at all. It attempts to connect facts about a decision-maker, such as having received a gift, to acts, such as choosing option A over option B. There is little, if anything, about the connecting psychological states, except that their contribution, whatever it is, is invisible to the decision-maker in question.

Relying on Dana's work, I propose to do three things here: 1) summarize this research, making clear its value for anyone concerned with controlling conflict of interest; 2) point out ways in which the research failed to study conflict of interest as such, studying instead related threats to objectivity, such as bias; and 3) suggest research that could provide information more directly useful to those seeking to regulate conflict of interest. I shall, in other words, argue for a research program for conflict of interest. I shall also, I hope, demonstrate the value of having philosophers involved from the beginning in such research.