Public disclosure could deter conflicts of interest

SIR — Your Business story "Fears rise over leaks of clinical trial results" (Nature 437, 191; 2005) describes a conflict-of-interest scandal in which US medical researchers with inside knowledge of ongoing clinical trials are being paid for information they provide as consultants to Wall Street analysts and investors.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) could start fixing this problem, at least for its own grantees. NIH-funded researchers are required to provide details of any consulting arrangements to their universities, which in turn approve or veto the plans. This information is confidential and usually cannot be seen by the public.

The NIH could require grantees to make public disclosures of their paid arrangements with pharmaceutical, investment and other companies, as well as their ownership of stock and stock options, as a condition of having their medical research funded by the government. The private finances of any US senator or representative can be checked in an instant through links at www.opensecrets.org/pfds. Why not create, by law, a similar system for medical researchers who receive government funding? [Nature, vol. 437, page 620, Sept. 29, 2005]

The NIH has not supported this kind of full public disclosure in the past, but it should do so now.

Sincerely,

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