What to do if a reader suspects undisclosed conflict of interest (Col) in a published article

1. Reader informs editor of author’s undisclosed Col
2. Thank reader and say you plan to investigate
3. Contact author(s) and express concern
4. Author(s) supplies relevant details
   - Thank author but point out seriousness of omission
   - Author(s) denies Col
   - Explain journal policy/Col definition clearly and obtain signed statement from author(s) about all relevant Cols (if not obtained previously)
   - Publish correction to competing interest statement as required
5. Inform reader of outcome

It may be helpful to provide a copy of the journal’s policy/definition of Col

Notes
To avoid future problems:
- Always get signed statement of Cols from all authors and reviewers before publication.
- Ensure journal guidelines include clear definition of Col.

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