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

Reader informs editor of author’s undisclosed Col

Thank reader and say you plan to investigate

Contact author(s) and express concern

Author(s) supplies relevant details

Thank author but point out seriousness of omission

Publish correction to competing interest statement as required

Inform reader of outcome

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)

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

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