



Australasian Sleep Trials Network Policy Document

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Acknowledgements

In developing these policies, the Australasian Sleep Trials Network has referred to and adapted policies of other research networks including: the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society Clinical Trials Group, the Australasian Kidney Trials Network, the Australasian Leukaemia and Lymphoma Group, the Australian New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials Group, the Trans-Tasman Radiation Oncology Group and the Canadian Respiratory Clinical Research Consortium. Policies on conflict of interest are largely based on the Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP) document *Ethical guidelines in the relationship between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry* and the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) document *Guidelines for the relationship between fellows and the healthcare industry*.

1 ASTN mission statement

The mission of the Australasian Sleep Trials Network is to conduct and facilitate clinical trials of national and international significance that will have a major impact on sleep health. It will achieve this mission principally through investigator driven trials, funded by government or industry.

2 ASTN policy on intellectual property

Intellectual Property means all legally enforceable rights which attach to the results of intellectual activity in the industrial, commercial, scientific, literary or artistic fields and may denote any product, process, result, work, invention, design, or concept whatsoever including secret know-how and confidential information.

In applying for support and endorsement by the Australasian Sleep Trials Network (ASTN), applicants will be asked to agree on suitable terms for ownership of any intellectual property (IP) created during the research period. For *ASTN-supported* projects, IP will normally be jointly owned by the Principal Investigator(s) and the ASTN, and where appropriate, approved collaborating institutions. Release of data to third parties may only occur with the bilateral agreement of the ASTN Executive and Principal Investigator(s). Ownership and downstream equity entitlements will be defined on a case-by-case basis during the application process. For investigator initiated projects with *ASTN endorsement*, ownership of the IP will remain with the investigator(s) and their institutions, in accordance with their institutional IP policy.

3 ASTN policy on consumer representative involvement

The Australasian Sleep Trials Network (ASTN) recognises the importance of consumer input in sleep health clinical trials and adheres to the NHMRC Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research. The ASTN Research Committee includes a Consumer Representative appointed independently by the Consumer Health Foundation to provide a consumer perspective on sleep health and research issues including recruitment, patient information for informed consent, new projects, and ethical issues.

4 ASTN policy on research studies

The Network's primary focus is on Australian and New Zealand investigator-led studies. Any individual or group who has an interest in undertaking studies in sleep health is eligible to apply. Study proposals must accord with the *Mission Statement* of the ASTN (see above). In general, at least three research centres should be involved. The proposal can be to conduct a cohort study or a clinical trial of a therapy, educational, public health intervention or diagnostic method.

4.1 The ASTN Research Committee

The ASTN Research Committee will be responsible for assessing the merits of all study proposals and making a recommendation to the ASTN Executive. The Research Committee is made up of the following members, appointed by the Executive:

- 2 Chief Investigators on the NHMRC Enabling Grant
- 4 other researchers, either Associated Investigators named in the Enabling Grant, or others with relevant clinical trials expertise
- Australasian Sleep Trials Network consultant biostatistician
- Australasian Sleep Trials Network consultant health economist
- 1 Consumer Representative

The Chair of the Research Committee is appointed by the ASTN Executive. The Committee may invite additional people with special skills to join them as required.

4.2 Types of research studies approved by the ASTN

Clinical trials conducted under the auspices of the Australasian Sleep Trials Network fall into two categories:

1. ASTN-Supported Studies

These studies must:

- accord with the mission statement of the Network
- address a pre-eminent question in sleep health
- merit publication in a leading medical journal

ASTN-supported studies are likely to meet NHMRC criteria for large scale clinical trials (i.e. have a budget in excess of \$300,000 in any one year or \$1,000,000 in total). It is likely that there will be only 2 or 3 studies which meet these criteria in a 5 year period.

Any individual or group may propose a Network-supported study to the Research Committee. Once in-principle approval is given by the Australasian Sleep Trials Network Research Committee and Executive, these studies will receive major and ongoing administrative and scientific support of the network. Network resources will be applied to assist with the design and development of the proposal, with applications to external granting agencies, and with the conduct of the study including recruitment, data management, statistics and data analysis, safety monitoring and the publication of the results in high impact journals. Trials designed by commercial companies or research groups outside Australasia would not normally be eligible to apply under this category.

In order to support a specific study the Network may collaborate with other organizations such as other clinical trials groups, professional societies, epidemiological or biostatistical groups, university-affiliated organizations or commercial companies. Any formal collaboration must be approved by the Principal Investigator(s) and the Australasian Sleep Trials Network and governed by a written Memorandum of Understanding or other legal agreement.

Assessment Process: The Research Committee will assess first draft ASTN-supported study proposals.

The Research Committee will:

- Recommend to Executive whether or not the proposal receive provisional support from the Network and the principal investigators be asked to further develop the proposal
- Recommend protocol changes/ refinements to enhance the quality of the proposal and its chances of success with external funding agencies
- Engage the services as required of the Australasian Sleep Trials Network biostatistician, health economist and National Project Officer or other resources to assist the principal investigators in refining and improving the proposal
- Review final draft Australasian Sleep Trials Network-supported study proposals
- Recommend to the Executive whether or not to proceed with the study
- Recommend to the Executive which Network resources should be allocated on an ongoing basis to ensure the success of the study e.g. recruitment infrastructure, biostatistician or health economics advice, central data management, inter-laboratory quality control, safety monitoring

Members of the Research Committee or Executive who have any involvement with the proposed trial or have any conflict of interest with the researcher(s) will be excluded from the decision making processes.

Assessment Criteria: The merit of studies will be judged on the basis of:

- The fit of the study to the Australasian Sleep Trials Network Mission Statement
- Scientific rigor and merit of the research plan
- Track record and potential of the research team
- Feasibility of successfully concluding the study bearing in mind issues such as access to suitable research subjects and competing demands on Australasian Sleep Trials Network resources

Study Management Committee. ASTN-supported studies are developed and conducted by a Study Management Committee which is appointed by the Executive and the Principal Investigator(s) on the recommendation of the Research Committee. The Chairperson will usually be the Principal Investigator. Other members may include co-principal investigators and major site coordinators. Protocol development and study funding, co-ordination, conduct, data analysis and interpretation, preparation and submission of manuscripts are overseen by the Study Management Committee and the ASTN Research Committee which reports to the Executive. To assist its function the Study Management Committee may form subcommittees. The nomination and appointment of people to these committees will be co-ordinated by the Principal Investigator(s) and approved by the Research Committee and ASTN Executive.

Reporting and Publication Policy. The Principal Investigator/Study Chair of each ASTN-supported study is responsible for providing an annual written progress report to the Research Committee and Executive Committee, and for an annual presentation to an Open Forum of the Network. A final report must be provided within 6 months of the study concluding regardless of whether the study ends successfully or it does not –e.g. terminated early because of safety concerns, poor accrual rates or other unforeseen factors.

The results of Australasian Sleep Trials Network studies must, on completion, be submitted for publication in a timely fashion. The Study Management Committee is responsible for setting a timetable for the data analysis and writing to achieve this objective. Authorship credit on manuscripts and final reports should be based on the Vancouver statement of Medical Journal Editors. i.e. substantial contribution in all three of the following criteria:

- Conception and design OR analysis and interpretation
- Drafting article OR critically revising it for intellectual content
- Final approval of version to be published

In addition, a fourth category of authorship is included for multicentre trials as follows:

- Institutions that register/ randomize a predetermined minimum proportion of the total patient numbers will be eligible to nominate 1-2 authors (number to be predetermined by Study Management Committee based on size of project and number of sites). These authors will be nominated by the institution's principal investigator usually on the basis of contribution to patient accrual. If an institution enters a particularly large number of cases it will be eligible to nominate additional authors up to a maximum of three.

Normally authors of publications detailing interim or final results will be:

- Principal investigator/ Study Chair as the first author;
- Members of study management committee, and relevant sub-committees (authors alphabetical order); followed by
- Statistician, health economist (if applicable), data manager, Australasian Sleep Trials Network national project officer (in alphabetical order); followed by (if applicable)
- Other participants who meet the authorship guidelines above; followed by
- An annotation "On Behalf of the Australasian Sleep Trials Network"

If by virtue of marked variations in level of participation or performance of investigators or centres there is reason to depart from these guidelines the Principal Investigator/ Study Chair should discuss this with the Research Chair, with reference to the Executive Committee for decision if there is

disagreement or uncertainty. Every publication should include an appendix or table listing all other participants, if all participating sites do not have authorship.

Correspondence will be addressed to the first author or other nominated author. If a nominated author is not required by the journal the default person for correspondence will be the Australasian Sleep Trials Network National Project Officer.

2. ASTN-Endorsed Studies

Studies put forward to the ASTN for endorsement must accord with the mission of the ASTN and meet the ASTN's standards with respect to scientific quality, ethics and conflict of interest. An individual or group of individuals develops these studies and is responsible for their conduct. The ASTN will normally only endorse studies prospectively - i.e. before they commence and not during enrolment or following completion. However, success with NHMRC funding for a multicentre trial in sleep health gives ASTN endorsement (if not previously obtained), and access to some ASTN resources. The Executive may agree to allocate some ASTN administrative or scientific resources towards endorsed studies - e.g. to help publicize the study, recruit centres, provide independent advice on study design, and limited consultant input for study design or analysis. More extended access to ASTN consultants can be extended if the investigator's institution pays half the consultancy fee.

Investigators can also apply for assistance to conduct **pilot studies** to provide data to justify bigger multicentre studies.

Commercial companies or international research groups can apply through Australian or New Zealand-based principal investigator(s) to the ASTN for clinical trial endorsement. As with ASTN-supported studies such proposals must accord with the ASTN mission and address a fundamental question related to sleep health. Such studies should not compromise access of Australasian investigator-driven proposals to the ASTN or compromise the overall quality or availability of the ASTN resource. Fees may be charged for assessment of studies submitted for endorsement and for ongoing services provided by the Network.

Investigators applying for ASTN endorsement of their study may not mention the ASTN in their application until the ASTN Executive Committee has formally endorsed the proposal.

The Research Committee will supervise the protocol review by at least 2 nominated individuals with appropriate expertise and make a recommendation for endorsement or non-endorsement to the Executive. The Research Committee will recommend to the Executive what, if any, ASTN resources be made available to the investigators to facilitate the study. Members of the Research Committee and Executive who have any involvement with the proposed trial or have any conflict of interest with the researchers or commercial sponsors will be excluded from the decision making.

The Principal Investigator of an ASTN-endorsed study is required to provide a brief report to the ASTN Executive on the progress of the trial at the end of each year. The Executive has the right to formally withdraw ASTN endorsement of the study at any time if it has reason to believe that the study is not progressing in accordance with Good Clinical Research Practice or the integrity of the project is seriously compromised for whatever reason.

The data of ASTN-endorsed studies are owned by the investigators. ASTN reserves the right to comment on all manuscripts and reports arising from such studies ahead of publication and to be acknowledged in all publications.

5 ASTN procedure for submission and consideration of study proposals

Study proposals must be developed in accordance with Good Clinical Research Practice, and include information outlining:

- Nominated Principal Investigators and Institutions
- Hypothesis, Rationale and Study Aims/Objectives
- Study population – Power and sample size calculations, relevant pilot data, inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Methodology – concealment, randomization, measurements, timelines, statistical analyses
- Safety – data monitoring and safety, termination criteria, adverse event reporting
- Regulatory section – ethics submission and consent forms, data capture methodology, and documentation requirements including NHMRC clinical trials registration

The proposal should be submitted on the Australasian Sleep Trials Network form (available on the website and from the National Project Officer) and meet the scheduled deadlines for submission (as published on the website), unless alternative timelines are negotiated with the Research Committee. Conflicts of interest, as defined in the Australasian Sleep Trials Network policy (see above), should be declared by applicants to the Research Committee and Executive at the time of submission of the proposal, and any substantive change to COI during the assessment process or conduct of the study also notified. Conflicts of interest by members of the Research Committee and Executive, as defined in the Australasian Sleep Trials Network policy, which may be reasonably perceived to have the potential to bias judgement with respect to a specific proposal, shall also be declared.

The Study Investigators must agree not to mention the Australasian Sleep Trials Network in any submission for funding until they have received final written approval indicating that the study has been accepted by the Australasian Sleep Trials Network either as an Australasian Sleep Trials Network-supported study or as an Australasian Sleep Trials Network-endorsed study. The Investigators must receive timely consideration by the Australasian Sleep Trials Network of their proposal bearing in mind the importance of reaching a decision on approval or otherwise ahead of external granting agency deadlines. Australasian Sleep Trials Network decisions and the rationale for those decisions shall be communicated in writing to the investigators.

6 ASTN appeals process

Unsuccessful applicants can appeal to the Advisory/Appeals Panel which shall be made up of 3 members appointed by the Executive of the Australasian Sleep Association (ASA).

7 ASTN policy on conflict of interest issues in clinical research

7.1 Scope

This policy will refer to industries related to the sleep health field, including, but not restricted to pharmaceutical industries and manufacturers of therapeutic, monitoring, and diagnostic devices. With references to the researcher it is understood that the researcher is involved in a study/research project/clinical trial at the least endorsed by the ASTN, and potentially supported by the ASTN. This policy is largely based on the Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP) document "Ethical guidelines in the relationship between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry" and on the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) document "Guidelines for the relationship between fellows and the healthcare industry".

7.2 General Principles

1. The primary concern of the researcher must remain the research subject or patient, for whom directly or indirectly, the researcher ensures their well being during study procedures and enrollment in study protocols.
2. The concept of a "conflict of interest" between the interests of academic research and the interests of industry is a difficult concept to encapsulate and has powerful negative connotations. It has been suggested that the notion of a "conflict of interest" might be usefully replaced with that of a "duality of interest" which recognises that, in a given situation, a researcher might have more than one interest. Such dualities should be openly reported as suggested above, and judgements about their significance, and whether any "conflict" exists, should be made by independent observers. The independent observer will generally be the ASTN Executive, unless the Executive members themselves decide that impartiality cannot be guaranteed, in which case the matter will be referred to the ASA.
3. There should be formal and open acknowledgement by the researcher receiving financial, in-kind, drug/equipment or other support from industry in order to conduct the research supported by the ASTN.
4. There should be formal and open acknowledgement by the researcher of any commercial relationships with industry or with drugs/equipment or techniques being assessed by studies or projects supported by the ASTN.
5. Researchers should not allow their names or the name of the ASTN, to be associated with any form of direct advertising, unless the commercial nature of their involvement is clearly stated and there has been prior approval by the Executive of the ASTN.
6. An association, in the form of ASTN endorsement of a project, between the ASTN and any pharmaceutical or commercial product or device, does not imply endorsement of the product or device. A disclaimer to this effect should be included in any advertising material and/or media releases or stories.
7. In any commercial arrangement between a researcher and industry, if the ASTN is directly or indirectly involved, the final agreement must be subject to ASTN Executive approval. If negotiations are conducted in a personal capacity, no mention of ASTN affiliation can be made.
8. Each ASTN study, either ASTN-endorsed or supported, must have a register of financial interests for principal investigators. Researchers unwilling to disclose financial interests for the purposes of the register cannot be involved in study design, patient recruitment or study analysis. The register will be maintained by the ASTN Executive and remain confidential.

7.3 Specific Issues

Conduct of industry-sponsored clinical trials

This discussion will pertain only to trials in which there is some form of industry involvement.

1. Study Design

- The study must have a plausible scientific basis. Projects which simply evaluate or promote a product will not be considered.

2. Researcher-Sponsor relationship

- The investigator(s) must not obtain direct personal or financial benefit from the conduct of an ASTN-endorsed or coordinated trial.
- Adequate compensation for expenses arising from the trial can be paid. The amount of payment must be administered under a formal contractual arrangement that is open to scrutiny. Remuneration should be paid into a fund subject to institutional guidelines, and be used solely for the execution of the study.
- When remuneration is determined on a *per capita* basis for subject recruitment, this must be approved by the ASTN Executive. As above, remuneration should be paid into a fund subject to institutional guidelines, and be used solely for the execution of the study.
- An institutional fund is one that is administered and controlled by the hospital or institution in which the research is being performed, or in the case of university employees, a university administered fund. As such it must be subject to the financial regulations of that institution, even if the funds are used for the purposes

of sleep research alone. A fund which is controlled by the researcher is not necessarily subject to such external control and is more open to perceptions of financial impropriety.

- For institutional managed funds, investigators must inform the ASTN Executive when such an arrangement is in place for an ASTN-endorsed study. For ASTN-coordinated studies, the ASTN Executive must approve the details of all contracts.

3. Publication of results

- It is not acceptable for publication to be subject to sponsor approval.
- The responsibility for writing should rest with the investigator(s). "Ghost writing" by industry scientists is not acceptable.

Industry-sponsored attendance at meetings and travel

The ideal manner for related industries to provide sponsorship to ASTN endorsed/supported investigators is through an independently organised scientific meeting, for which the costs of bringing in invited speakers are defrayed by sponsorship provided by the industry member(s). The cost of attending such meetings is borne by the individual investigator(s), for its value to his/her education. In accepting sponsorship outside these guidelines the investigator(s) must be aware of the following recommendations:

1. Attendance at a scientific meeting at which the investigator is making a contribution

Sponsorship of individual investigator(s) to attend meetings of scientific societies for either a scientific contribution or as an organiser is acceptable. The organising committee, not the sponsor, should make actual payment to the individual. Such sponsorship should be acknowledged, and should be of a magnitude judged reasonable by the committee. Individuals offered sponsorship independent of the organising committee should encourage the sponsor to approach the committee. If ASTN research is to be part of the presentation, then the ASTN Executive should be notified of the sponsorship. Meetings organised by the pharmaceutical or device industry will call into question the independence of the invited speaker. For these meetings, the ASTN Executive should approve the presentation of ASTN research. Such meetings should not purport to be under the auspices of the ASTN.

2. Attendance at a scientific meeting at which the investigator is not making a contribution

If the investigator(s) is not making a formal contribution to an industry-sponsored meeting, then the researcher should follow the guidelines approved by their institution. The ASTN can not be affiliated with such meetings, and the investigator(s) must not be seen to be a representative of the ASTN, unless prior approval by the ASTN Executive has been granted.

3. Attendance at other meetings

The pharmaceutical and device industries also provide support for other meetings, such as product launches, hospital grand rounds, and local meetings of specialists or departments. As above, the ASTN can not be affiliated with such meetings, and the investigator(s) must not be seen to be a representative of the ASTN, unless prior approval by the ASTN Executive has been granted.

Industry support for ASTN meetings- support for venues, speakers and other costs

It is acceptable to approach members of the pharmaceutical and device industries to provide support for ASTN meetings. Certain principles should always apply

- Support must never be contingent on alterations in the program, speakers or other aspects of the scientific format of the meeting. The ASTN Executive and members of associated committees, including but not limited to Associate Investigators of the ASTN and ASTN supported investigators should arrange the scientific program.
- Support for the costs of a visiting speaker is acceptable as long as such support is acknowledged. If the chosen issue is known to be a contentious one then there should be a balance of speakers canvassing alternate views.
- It is acceptable for the industry to provide other support in the form of venues, refreshments and so forth. As above, all support must be acknowledged.
- It is not acceptable for the industry to exhibit its products at ASTN meetings, although display of logos acknowledging the support of the industry, and verbal acknowledgements during the presentations is acceptable.

Other remuneration provided to researchers

Gifts and entertainment

Benefits received from a pharmaceutical or device company must leave an individual's independence of judgement unimpaired. In general, the guidelines of an individual's Institution should be followed, and the ASTN cannot be associated in any way with provision of such goods or services. It is recognised that judgement on these matters may sometimes be difficult. If there is to be any perception that the ASTN is involved then the matter should be notified to the ASTN Executive.

Remuneration for other services

Individual investigators are entitled to remuneration for any consultative or other services he/she provides to pharmaceutical or device industries. There may, however, be a risk of potential conflict of interest with ASTN research, and therefore, such arrangements need to be transparent and open. If the remuneration is a one-off fee for a consultation, then notification of the ASTN Executive should be sufficient disclosure. However, if the researcher is employed by or regularly remunerated by an industry member(s), then that arrangement must be approved by the ASTN Executive. The overriding principle must be that full disclosure is the preferred course of action if there is any doubt.

Researchers' personal finances and conflicts of interest

It is impossible to lay down precise guidelines in this area, but a useful general principle might be that an impartial observer would not consider that financial interests in the company involved had significantly influenced a researcher's judgement about a pharmaceutical agent or device. Such interests might include:

- Share holdings or options
- Board membership
- Paid employment
- Fellowships or other grants

It is not expected that investigators divest themselves of personal assets, or otherwise modify their financial dealings in order to participate in ASTN trials. It is expected, however, that individual investigators remain aware of the potential for COI issues to arise, and of the potential adverse effect on the ASTN of any perception of impropriety. It must be the responsibility of the investigator(s) to recognise a potential conflict, and the appropriate response should be disclosure to the ASTN Executive, who should decide whether it is a matter for further discussion. Potential solutions to COI issues will vary according to circumstances. If an investigator has a substantial and direct financial interest in a study outcome, (for example a major stockholding or regular paid employment directly related to ASTN research) then, in most cases, he/she should not be involved in study design or direction, patient recruitment or consent, or data analysis. In the case of less substantial interests (for example, small stockholding, or occasional consulting fees, unrelated to ASTN research) then disclosure may be sufficient.

Assets such as stocks or options held by immediate family members may be viewed as creating a COI in the same way as if the investigator held them. The guiding principle must be how the public would view such arrangements, and divesting assets by transferring them to family members might not be perceived as resolving a potential conflict. This area is obviously difficult, and each case will need to be treated on its merits. In the event of an investigator holding a patent (with or without commercial sponsorship) for a product, then full disclosure to the ASTN Executive is absolutely essential if the research is to be ASTN-endorsed or ASTN-coordinated. Individuals holding patents are not necessarily excluded from participating in research, but the guiding principle again should be how the public would view such arrangements.

In all cases of potential COI, any publications should make mention of interests held or retained by the investigator(s) during the study period.

Other recommendations

The specific recommendations made above will cover most situations. In any situation not covered by this document, an investigator concerned about a potential COI should contact the ASTN Executive or National Project Officer. The ASTN Executive or a subcommittee of the Executive should review these guidelines at an interval determined by the Executive.

8 References

Royal Australian College of Physicians. Ethical guidelines in the relationship between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry. RACP, Sydney, 2000 [<http://RACP.edu.au/members/fyi/resources/pharm>]

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists. Guidelines for the relationship between fellows and the healthcare industry. ANZCA, Melbourne, 2000.
[<http://anzca.edu.au/publications/profdocs/profstandards>]

Updated at ASTN Executive meeting on 24/03/07