

Policies and practices on conflicts of interest of editors and peer reviewers in medical journals: cross-sectional study

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I hereby declare that I have no current conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.

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What do we know?

- ❑ **Personal beliefs and conflicts of interest** may influence peer reviewers' and editors' assessments and editorial decisions (1-3)
- ❑ The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (**ICMJE**), the Committee on Publication Ethics (**COPE**), and the World Association of Medical Editors (**WAME**) recommend that editors and reviewers disclose interests that could influence the editorial process



What do we know?

- ❑ 2018 study investigated 350 medical journals that followed the ICMJE recommendations and reported that **19% had a conflict of interest policy for editors and 34% for peer reviewers** (1)
- ❑ **Journal impact factor** seems to be associated with having public policies (2-4)
- ❑ **Few previous studies have analysed the content of policies or described how journals practically manage and enforce conflict of interest policies**

Objectives

To investigate conflicts of interest of medical journal editors and peer reviewers on:

- Prevalence** of policies
- Association between journal characteristics and having a policy
- Content** of policies
- Management** and **enforcement**

Methods

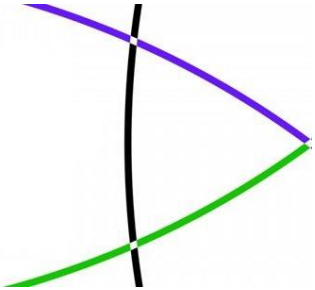
Protocol



Cross-sectional study



Journal Citation Reports



Random sample of 250 of 3,784 medical journals



Survey of journal policies and disclosures



Online questionnaire with 26 items

Preliminary results

Journal characteristics

N = 250

	Journal impact factor, median (IQR)	2.9 (1.9 – 4.5)
250 journals	Journal Citation Reports category	
	Pharmacology & pharmacy	22 (9%)
	Oncology	18 (7%)
	Public, environmental & occupational health	14 (6%)
	Medicine, general & internal	14 (6%)
	Immunology	13 (5%)
	Other (39 categories)	169 (68%)
150 journals	DOAJ indexed journal, n (%)	47 (19%)
	COPE member, n (%)	178 (71%)
	ICMJE-follower, n (%)	79 (32%)
	Journals affiliated with third party, n (%)	136 (54%)
20 respondents	Publishers, n (%)	
	Elsevier	46 (18%)
	Springer Nature	40 (16%)
	Wiley	26 (10%)
	Wolters Kluwer	22 (9%)
	Taylor & Francis	17 (7%)
	Other (51 publishers)	86 (34%)

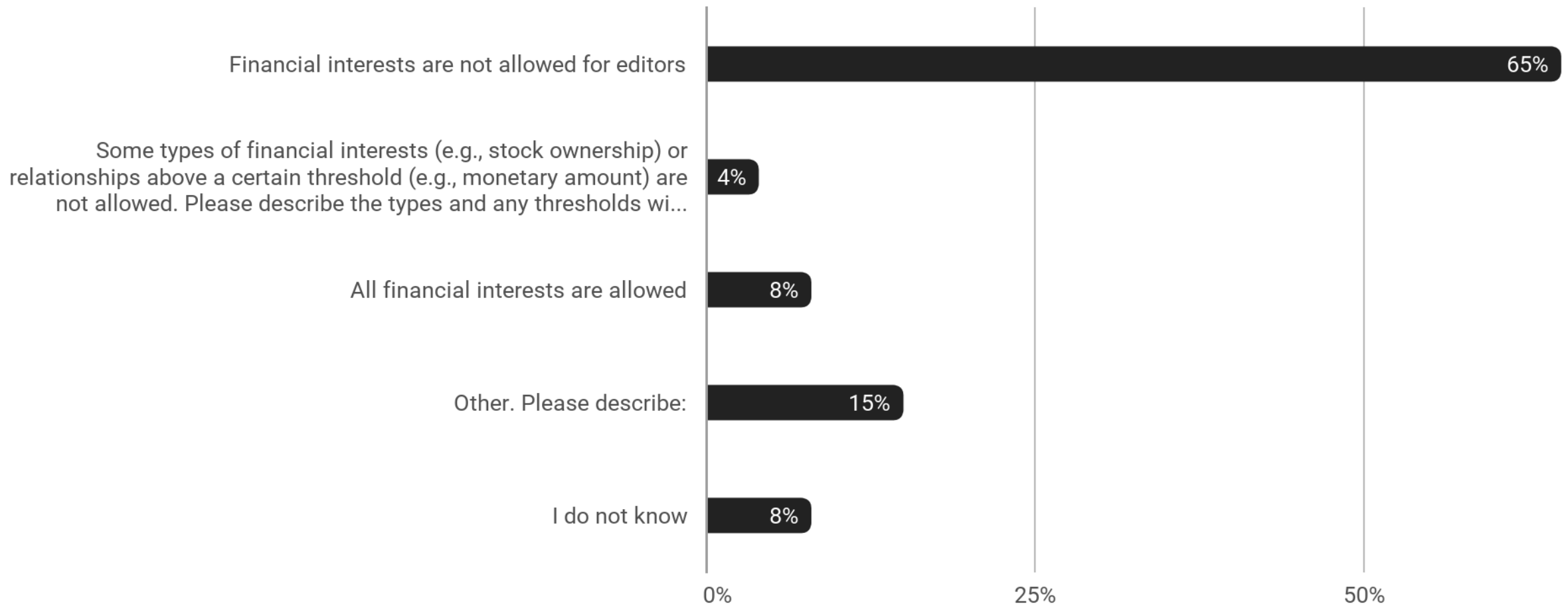
Preliminary results

Journal policies	Journal characteristic	N=250	
		Crude odds ratio (95%CI)	Adjusted* odds ratio (95%CI)
	Journal impact factor		
	Editors	1.32 (1.12 – 1.55)	1.26 (1.03 – 1.56) ¹
	Peer reviewers	1.24 (1.07 – 1.45)	1.20 (0.99 – 1.45) ¹
	DOAJ indexed journal		
	Editors	2.98 (1.20 – 7.38)	3.01 (0.82 – 11.13) ²
	Peer reviewers	3.57 (1.35 – 9.48)	3.42 (0.90 – 13.02) ²
	ICMJE follower		
	Editors	1.02 (0.56 – 1.87)	0.76 (0.30 – 1.92) ³
	Peer reviewers	1.43 (0.76 – 2.70)	1.38 (0.53 – 3.57) ³
	COPE member		
	Editors	2.47 (1.36 – 4.48)	4.80 (1.84 – 12.55) ³
	Peer reviewers	2.00 (1.10 – 3.64)	3.12 (1.14 – 8.50) ³
	Affiliated with third party		
	Editors	0.62 (0.35 – 1.10)	0.67 (0.30 – 1.49) ⁴
	Peer reviewers	0.56 (0.31 – 1.00)	0.48 (0.20 – 1.15) ⁴
	No disclosures		

CI: Confidence interval. *Multilevel mixed effects logistic regression with publisher and JCR category as random effects and adjusted for covariates

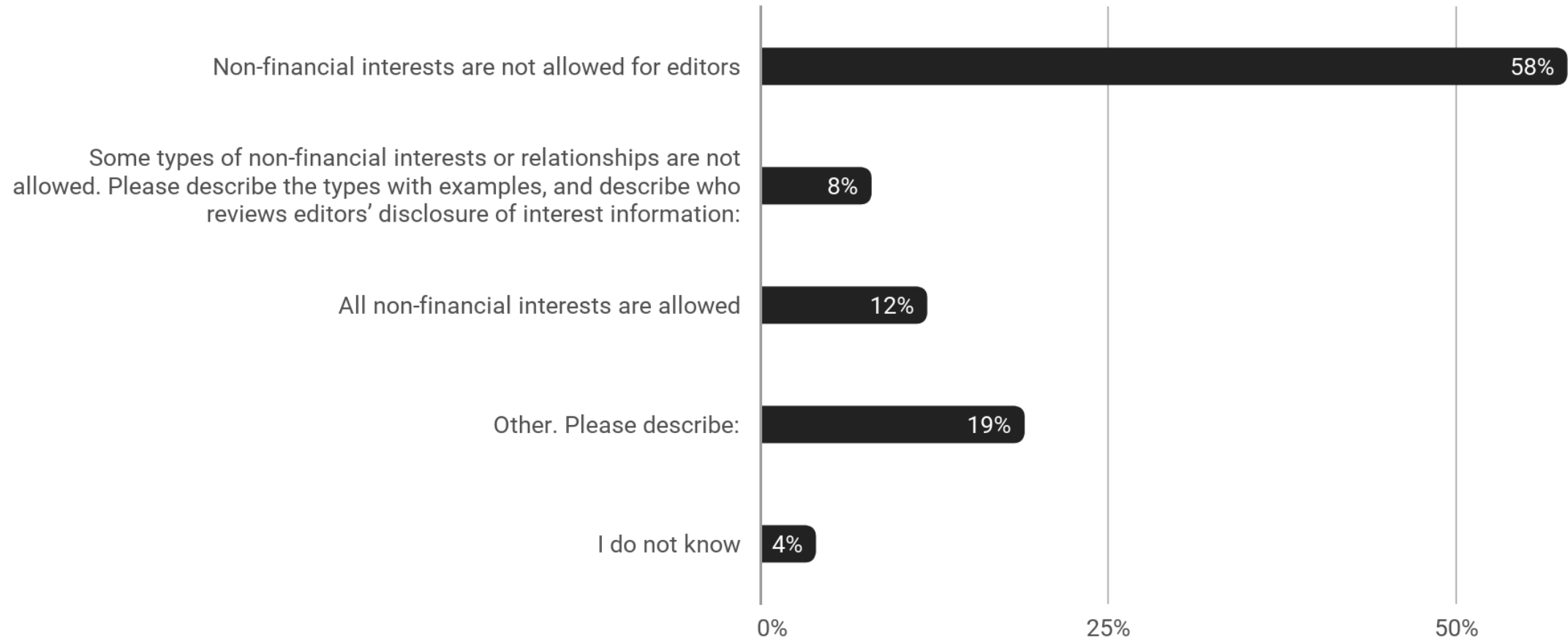
Preliminary results – questionnaire (N=26)

Question: Are journal editors allowed to have financial interests that may result in conflicts of interest when deciding on manuscripts?



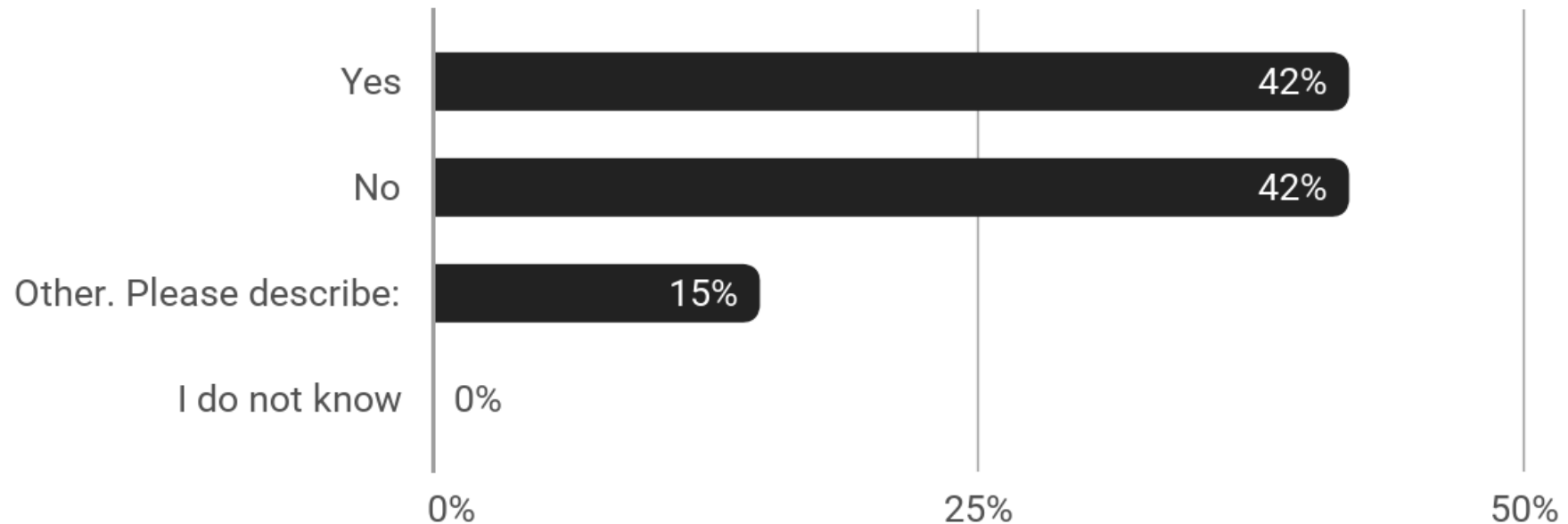
Preliminary results – questionnaire (N=26)

Question: Are journal editors allowed to have non-financial interests that may result in conflicts of interest when deciding on manuscripts, such as previous collaboration with the corresponding author?



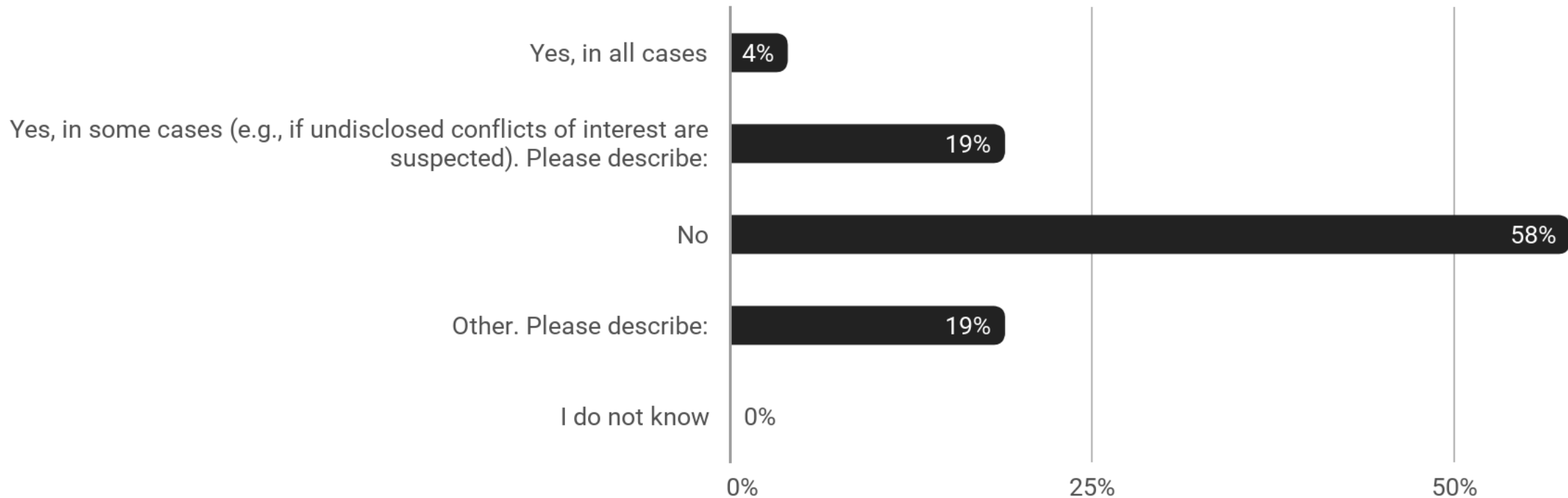
Preliminary results – questionnaire (N=26)

Question: Does your journal's policy or instructions specify that peer reviewers should provide disclosure of interests in the reviewer report?



Preliminary results – questionnaire (N=26)

Question: Does your journal check if all relevant interests are disclosed by a reviewer?



Take home

- ❑ **Three out of four** medical journals had policies for editors and peer reviewers
- ❑ **Half** had policies on the journal website
- ❑ Public disclosure of editors' and peer reviewers' interests is **very rare**
- ❑ **Journal impact factor** and **COPE membership** associated with having publicly available policies
- ❑ **The majority** are not allowing editor conflicts of interest
- ❑ **Half** are requesting reviewer disclosures, but editors rarely check the accuracy

Thank you for your attention