To the Editor

The New England Journal of Medicine's apology for violating its own strict conflict-of-interest rules for reviews and editorials (news article, Feb. 24) prompts me to challenge the conventional wisdom of "the stricter the better."

Strict conflict-of-interest policies are themselves biased, since they suggest that researchers who work for drug companies are susceptible to introducing bias into a study, while government- and foundation-financed scientists never have an ax to grind.

By disclosing certain potential conflicts, journals risk damaging the value of the peer-review process. When studies associated with corporate interests are given stricter scrutiny on the basis of a potential bias, other studies are implicitly given a lesser degree of scrutiny.