Research Compliance Quandary

Dr. Callaway is a world-renowned scientist in the field of neuroscience. One of Dr. Callaway's discoveries was identification of a compound that appears to reverse and cure multiple sclerosis (MS), which, until now, was a progressive, incurable disease. Dr. Callaway, through his institution, applied and received a patent for this compound. A small company was established to continue experimentation on the compound, and eventually bring the compound through clinical trials and to market. The institution and Dr. Callaway own 51% of this company.

Dr. Callaway runs a large lab at his institution; lab members include several post-doctoral fellows and research assistants, and one graduate student, Pamela. The graduate student has passed her Preliminary Exams and is now focused on her thesis research. While several different and interesting projects were in progress with the post-doc's and research assistants, Dr. Callaway gave Pamela only one choice for a thesis topic: she must work with him on the compound for treating MS. Pamela agreed because she saw this as a potential opportunity for significant recognition and possible financial gain.

Questions:
- Is it ethical for a thesis advisor to put a graduate student on a project that involves potential fame and/or financial gain for the student?

  Yes, if the potential conflict of interest (COI) for both mentor and student is managed by the Institution's Conflict of Interest in Research Committee.

- If acceptable, how should the institution handle this situation?

  The COI Committee should discuss management plans and chose one best suited for this situation.

- Should an ad hoc committee be established for careful monitoring of this student's research?

  Yes, this would provide additional oversight.

- Who should compose this ad hoc committee?

  Senior tenured faculty with active labs.

- By NIH standards, should both Dr. Callaway and Pamela be required to complete Individual Financial Conflict of Interest in Research Disclosure Forms?

  Yes