

American Thoracic Society Policy Related to Professionalism and Ethical Conduct

Statement of Principles: To protect its integrity and professional reputation, the American Thoracic Society (ATS) requires all those participating in official ATS activities to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and ethical conduct. Official ATS activities include any formal service to the ATS, encompassing but not limited to elected or appointed office, the development of official ATS documents, planning, attending, or presenting at ATS conferences (including virtual and live events), and participation in official ATS projects or online platforms.

Standards of Professionalism and Ethical Conduct: Standards include but are not limited to:

- Adhering to professional codes of ethics;¹
- Acting fairly, in good faith, honestly, and respectfully in all dealings with patients, peers, other healthcare professionals, trainees, others that the individual encounters in carrying out the individual's professional role, and ATS staff and volunteers;
- Adhering to ethical principles in research. Fabrication, misleading reports, and theft of data constitute egregious departures from the expected norms of scientific conduct;
- Respecting confidential information where designated or commonly expected;
- Fully disclosing and managing in a manner consistent with ATS policies any professional relationship, action, or other circumstance that may result in a conflict of interest. When objectivity and effectiveness cannot be maintained, participation in official ATS activities should be avoided or discontinued, either with respect to the matter involving the conflict of interest or entirely.
- Refraining from sexual harassment or harassment based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or other protected characteristics, and from retaliation for declining, objecting to, or reporting prohibited harassment or other sexual conduct.

Responsibility to Notify the Society: Members, candidates for membership, and non-members seeking to participate in an official ATS activity must notify the ATS Chief Executive Officer if they are not in good standing within their profession.² The Society also reserves the right to ask all candidates seeking participation in official ATS activities to disclose any information that might reasonably raise concern about professional and ethical misconduct. The Society likewise reserves the right to act upon credible information pertaining to misconduct which may come to its attention through direct reports of alleged violations of this policy or through other channels such as news reports, internet notifications, and communications from other professional societies.

Violations: The following represent violations of the professional standards expected of ATS members, candidates and non-members participating in official ATS activities and may provide justification for imposition of sanctions:

¹ For example, the American Medical Association Principles of Medical Ethics.

² For example, those who have been barred from scientific or clinical activities due to proven intentional, knowing or reckless misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of research data, fraudulent clinical billing, and crimes occurring in the context of professional practice.

- Suspension or involuntary termination of a professional license, hospital privileges, faculty appointment or training program;
- Professional censure or reprimand by official bodies (e.g. state public health or other academic professional societies);
- Breaches of standards of ethical and professional conduct as noted above, whether self-reported or reported by the individual's institution, co-workers, another ATS member in good standing, ATS staff, other witnesses or victims of a violation, or public authorities
- A finding from a credible body such as the Federal government's Office of Research Integrity, other Federal, state, or governmental agencies (e.g., NSF, NIH), another professional organization, an academic institution, or a court of law, or an admission of conduct sexual harassment or other discrimination, harassment or retaliation that, in an employment context, would be prohibited by law, if directed at colleagues, subordinates, students, grantor representatives, teaching or research assistants, or others with whom the individual interacts as a result of the individual's profession.

Felony convictions must be reported to the Society within 30 days of the felony conviction and may, depending on the underlying conduct, also result in imposition of sanctions. Failure to report a felony conviction or to disclosure information requested by the Society that is needed for the Society's review of the circumstances constitutes a violation of this policy that may result in sanctions.

Sanctions: Sanctions resulting from ethical and professional misconduct are intended to maintain the public's confidence in the ATS and its activities. Violations may jeopardize an individual's participation in the ATS and may include sanctions such as:

- Suspension or termination of eligibility to participate in some or all official ATS activities;
- Suspension, termination, or denial of membership.
- Notification of another professional society or entity needs to be notified (e.g., if the individual serves on a joint guideline panel)

Adjudication of Sanctions: In accordance with ATS by-laws, due process will be followed to ensure fairness when sanctions are considered. Adjudication will include the following steps:

- Any member may be subject to reprimand by a two-thirds vote of the Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest ("Ethics Committee") for violation of applicable conduct or conflicts of interest policies, in accordance with policies and procedures adopted by the Board of Directors from time to time. The Ethics Committee may, upon a two-thirds vote, recommend other discipline, including suspension or expulsion, to the Executive Committee, which shall have the authority to impose any discipline by a two-thirds vote.
- Any volunteer (whether a member of ATS or not) in an official ATS role, or proposed to ATS to do so, may be declared by ATS staff leadership and/or the Ethics Committee to be ineligible for that role pursuant to applicable conflicts of interest policies, in accordance with policies and procedures adopted by the Board of Directors from time to time. Examples of official volunteer ATS roles include, but are not limited to, serving on writing committees of official ATS documents, such as clinical practice guidelines, and presenting at official ATS conferences.

- Any volunteer holding a position appointed by the President may be removed from their Board, Committee, or other volunteer position by the President or subject to other discipline by the President in accordance with the Bylaws, or, for positions not addressed in the Bylaws, based on a finding by the Ethics Committee of a credible basis to believe that the volunteer acted in violation of this or other ATS conduct policies.
- A volunteer holding a position as a result of election by the Board of Directors, the membership, or any membership group may be removed from their Board, Committee, or other volunteer position in a summary suspension imposed by the Ethics Committee or may be subject to other discipline under any procedures that are permitted by the Bylaws and applicable law.
- The Society may inform the employer or home institution of the Covered Person or sister organizations of the existence and status of any disciplinary proceeding by the Ethics Committee, Executive Committee, or Board of Directors and may inform any third party of the final decision and any sanction imposed in any disciplinary proceeding.