



*Fostering education, awareness and hope to improve pain and restore quality of life*

ETHICS, PROFESSIONALISM AND EQUALITY  
COMMITTEE POLICY  
AND  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

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## **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Ethics, Professionalism and Equality Committee Policy and Standard Operating Procedures (“Policy”) is to define and establish principles for professional behavior that governs all IPPS activities, and members, exhibitors, sponsors, contractors, volunteers and non-members participating in IPPS sponsored activities. The IPPS aims to foster and support a safe and professional environment to learn, conduct research, and communicate clinical and scientific knowledge with integrity, respect, fairness, trustworthiness and transparency. The professional environment includes interactions within the society, the scientific community and with members of the public. Breaching the guidelines set out in the Policy may have consequences, which may include, but is not limited to reporting the violation and sanctions, as outlined in the Policy. This document also outlines the operating procedures for providing ways to report discrimination, harassment or bullying behavior, confidential support for victims, a formal process for investigating formal or informal complaints and for addressing each type of complaint.

## **2. CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **A. Principles**

- i. Excellence, integrity and honesty in all aspects of IPPS function, presentations, and research
- ii. Professional courtesy, equity and fairness when working with IPPS members and with others
- iii. Personal accountability in the conduct of IPPS business, dissemination of education and its mission
- iv. Freedom to responsibly pursue scientific and educational endeavors without interference or coercion
- v. Legal compliance in all aspects of IPPS business, education, research and dissemination of the of IPPS’s mission

### **B. Responsibilities**

During IPPS events and activities, including those events and activities sponsored by IPPS, IPPS expects:

- i. Members to take full responsibility for their behavior and trustworthiness of their research and its dissemination (if applicable)
- ii. Members to adhere to IPPS regulations, professional ethics as required by their specialty, law and policy related to discrimination, harassment and bulling
- iii. Members to disclose financial, personal, professional and other conflicts of interest to the IPPS chair or president that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work on IPPS committees, Board, publications, presentations and public communications, honors and award activities.
- iv. Members who are presenting will limit professional comments to their areas of expertise and will clearly distinguish professional comments from their opinions based on personal views. This shall also apply to members representing IPPS at non-IPPS events and activities.
- v. Members are encouraged to intervene where possible to prevent misconduct, including fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, discrimination, harassment, bullying or other behavior that undermine the professional environment established by the IPPS.

- vi. Members to be responsible for creating and upholding a safe, open, and professional environment for learning, conducting and communication research or clinical practice with integrity, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency at all organizational levels.
- vii. Members and non-members to not engage in discrimination, harassment, bullying, dishonesty, fraud, misrepresentation, coercive manipulation, censorship or other misconduct that alters the mission of the society, the reporting, veracity or meaning of research findings or the function of the society.

### C. Harassment, bullying, discrimination

- i. The IPPS promotes a professional environment at its events that is free from discrimination and harassment. As such, IPPS prohibits discrimination or harassment for any reason, including but not limited to ethnic or national origin, race, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, age or economic class during its events and activities. The IPPS opposes all forms of bullying including threatening, humiliating, coercive, or intimidating conduct that causes harm to, interferes with or sabotages IPPS activities, career advancement or healthy exchange of ideas. Such behavior, whether intended or unintended, is offensive, destructive and counter to IPPS ideals. Discrimination, including sexual harassment, or bullying in at any IPPS event or activity is unacceptable and constitutes misconduct under this policy. Such behavior should be reported and addressed with consequences for the offender as outlined later in this Policy.

### D. Definitions

- i. Discrimination means unequal or unfair treatment in professional opportunities, education, benefits, evaluation and employment (such as hiring, termination, promotion, compensation) as well as retaliation and various types of harassment. Discriminatory practices can be explicit or implicit, intentional or unconscious.
- ii. Harassment is a type of discrimination that consists of a severe act, or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts, which are unwanted, unwelcome, demeaning, a business or offensive. Offensive conduct constitutes harassment when 1) it becomes a condition of an opportunity, education, benefit, evaluation, or employment or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work or educational environment that most people would consider intimidating, hostile or abusive. These acts may include epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping based on gender, race, equal identity, or other categories, as protected by U.S. federal and state law. Also included are threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts; denigrating jokes and displays; or circulation of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or a group.
- iii. Sexual harassment includes any unwanted and/or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of sexual nature. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there are two types of sexual harassment: a) quid pro quo and 2) hostile work environment. Sexual harassment can be physical and psychological in nature. An aggregation of a series of incidents can constitute sexual harassment even if one of the incidents considered on its own would not be harassing.
- iv. Bullying is the use of force, threat, or coercion to abuse, intimidate, or aggressively dominate others in the professional environment that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. These actions can include abusive criticism, humiliation, the spreading of rumors, physical and verbal attacks, isolation, undermining and professional exclusion of individuals through any means.
- v. Conflict of interest arises when a person in a position of authority over an organization, such as a director, officer, or manager, may benefit personally from a decision he or she could make.

## **E. Mentor-Learner Interactions**

IPPS mentors should promote an environment that is intellectually stimulating but free of harassment, supportive, equitable, and respectful of the educational goals of the student. Mentors must recognize and respect the cultural background of the students and be sensitive to the power imbalance in the student-advisor relationship.

# **3. PROCESS FOR INVESTIGATING AND RESOLVING COMPLAINTS**

## **A. Procedure**

- i. Allegations of misconduct may be submitted to the IPPS when the alleged action is directly connected to a program operated under the direction of the IPPS, its presentations, publications, meetings, events, and exhibitions. An allegation is not in itself proof of misconduct, and because allegations have the potential to damage professional credibility and cast doubt on the entire career of an accused party, whenever possible, the IPPS will observe strict confidentiality, until the investigation process has been completed and a ruling is issued by the Board of Directors. After completion, confidentiality may or may not be preserved, depending on the case and the findings.
- ii. Allegations of misconduct by IPPS members, staff, or others in connection with IPPS activities, must be submitted in writing directly to the Chair of the Ethics, Professionalism and Equality Committee (EPEC) at [IPPS-EPEC@pelvicpain.org](mailto:IPPS-EPEC@pelvicpain.org).
- iii. The allegation(s) must contain the following information:
  - a. The name and affiliation of the person(s) submitting the allegation and the name an identifying information of the person(s) alleged to have committed the misconduct.
  - b. A description of the allegation that includes the date and circumstances of the alleged misconduct.
  - c. Any documents or other relevant items that support the allegation (e.g. data, papers, memos, emails, photographs, etc.) with annotation showing specifically how the time relates to the allegation.
  - d. An explanation of how the allegation is considered misconduct as defined in this Policy.
  - e. A statement explaining any conflict(s) of interest the person making the allegation has with the subject(s), entity(its) or situation(s) named in the allegation. A conflict of interest does not preclude the filing of an allegation.
- iv. Allegations may be returned if they do not contain the above information. It is advisable for anyone experiencing unacceptable behavior to keep detailed records of such incidents, including dates, and names of any potential witnesses.
- v. Within 10 business days of receipt, when reasonably possible, of an allegation, the EPEC Chair or her/his/their designee will notify:
  - a. the committee members
  - b. the IPPS Chairman of the Board, President and Executive Director
  - c. acknowledge receipt of the allegation to the complainant.
- vi. Submitted allegations will be initially reviewed by the EPEC committee, and within 15 business days, as reasonably possible, will report to the IPPS President and EPEC members whether the initial allegation:
  - a. Does not constitute misconduct as defined by IPPS and no further action is warranted

- b. Appears to constitute misconduct as defined by the IPPS and may require further investigation and action by the IPPS Board.
- vii. If the IPPS President and EPEC agree that the allegation does not constitute misconduct, the complainant will be notified as soon as reasonably possible by the EPEC Chair and the allegation will be dismissed.
- viii. If the EPEC members believe that the allegation may constitute misconduct, then an investigation will be initiated which may include outside resources or expertise. At that time the complainant and respondent will be notified.
- ix. If the respondent admits to the alleged misconduct at any time during the procedure, the investigation will be halted and EPEC will prepare recommendation to the Board of Directors for actions or sanctions to be taken.
- x. If necessary, steps will be taken to prevent harassment of the complainant, and EPEC may consider what additional protections need to be implemented.
- xi. In some cases, an allegation may be resolved informally, such as through an apology and assurance that the action will not happen again (especially in cases of the respondent unknowingly causing offense) or may best be resolved through mediation. Either the complainant, respondent or the EPEC Chair, may make a recommendation for mediation at any time during the investigation process, or as a final resolution after an investigation is completed.

## **B. Involved parties**

- i. The **Complainant** is the individual who registers/makes the allegation with IPPS. The complainant need not be an IPPS member.
- ii. The **Respondent** is the individual(s) again whom the allegation(s) is made. The respondent must be an IPPS member or, an author of an IPPS publication or presentation, or an IPPS meeting attendee, contractor or exhibitor.
- iii. The **Chair of the Ethics, Professionalism and Equality Committee (EPEC)** coordinates IPPS investigations of misconduct. The EPEC chair is nominated by EPEC members and appointed after approval, via majority vote, by the IPPS Board of Directors.
- iv. The **Board of Directors** has the final authority to determine what actions will be taken if an allegation is found to be substantiated.
- v. The **Ethics, Professionalism and Equality Committee (EPEC)** reports to the Board of Directors and is responsible for investigating allegations that are deemed by the Chair of the Ethics Committee to be substantial and thereby require investigation. In addition to its standing membership, additional EPEC members may be appointed as needed, with membership selected based on the nature of the case or allegation. The Chair will name one of the committee members as the Vice Chair to assist and serve as Chair in the event of conflict of interest, or if the Chair cannot serve for other reasons. Because of other substantial responsibilities, IPPS committee Chairs should not be considered for nomination. The IPPS President will work with the EPEC Chair to review nominations and finalize EPEC membership.

## **C. Process for investigation**

- i. EPEC will complete its investigation within 90 days, when reasonably possible, but may ask for an extension from the IPPS President, if needed, and for additional legal or non-legal expertise. If the internet and conference calls are to be used as part of the panel operations, adequate security and confidentiality of the proceedings must be taken.
- ii. The EPEC Chair will consult with its members to determine the schedule of the investigation and make assignments regarding specific actions to be taken by the committee and its members. ALL

PROCEDURES WILL BE CONDUCTED UNDER STRICT CONFIDENTIALITY; however, the identity of the complainant may be revealed to the respondent, the committee members and the witnesses as needed.

- iii. The EPEC chair will notify the complainant and respondent in writing that an allegation has been received and will be investigated and will provide an approximate timetable and description of the investigation.
- iv. Information and data about the allegation will be collected. The complainant and respondent will be invited to meet with EPEC. Any information collected by the committee will be forwarded to both the complainant and respondent at least 5 business days before the meeting so that all parties may have time to evaluate it and prepare a response. The complainant and respondent may also provide written statements for themselves or others as part of the preceding at least 5 business days before the meeting.
- v. During the meeting:
  - a. The EPEC Chair will summarize the allegation and associated evidence of misconduct
  - b. The respondent will be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations
  - c. EPEC members will be allowed to ask questions of both the complainant and the respondent
- vi. At a separate meeting the EPEC will consider all the evidence presented and make a determination as to whether misconduct occurred and recommend a response for each act of misconduct. To make this determination, there must be a quorum of the EPEC (described in the IPPS bylaws as the majority of voting members). The final recommendation(s) that will be presented to the Board of Directors will be determined by a majority vote.
- vii. The findings and recommendations of EPEC will be forwarded to the Board of Directors in a report prepared by EPEC and submitted by the Chair. The report should be clear, complete and a final determination of all charges. At a minimum, the report will include 1) a summary of the alleged misconduct, 2) a summary of the fact-finding activities of the committee, 3) discussion and conclusion of the fact finding, 4) recommendation for actions or sanctions to be taken, and 5) appendices as needed containing supporting documents and written statements.
- viii. The respondent or complainant may retain the services of an attorney at their own cost. IPPS may also retain legal counsel if EPEC or the IPPS Board Directors deems it necessary and expenses for IPPS legal fees will be paid by IPPS.
- ix. Real or apparent conflicts of interest must be disclosed in all actions by EPEC, EPEC Chair, the subject matter experts retained by the Committee and the Board of Directors during an investigation. Members with relevant conflict of interest must recuse themselves from participation in the investigation, discussions, decisions and votes on actions to be taken.

#### **D. Review by the Board of Directors**

The IPPS Board of Directors, in Executive Session at its next scheduled meeting, will review the findings and recommendations submitted by EPEC. The Board may accept or reject the EPEC recommendations of actions to be taken but MAY NOT reject the conclusions (findings) of EPEC. The Board can request additional investigation which EPEC will have 90 days to conduct, when reasonably possible. The action of the BOD will be summarized in a report for the record and a copy forwarded to EPEC. The Board will notify the EPEC Chair, the respondent and the complainant of its decision within 10 business days of the Executive Session.

#### **E. Sanctions**

If a finding of misconduct is made by EPEC, the Board of Directors will decide on the actions to be taken which may be the same or different as recommended by EPEC. The BOD will specify the sanctions, the period of time over which the sanction(s) will be in effect, correction of the publication and /or meeting record, and

recommendations for education or training. Sanctions, in increasing severity, may include but are not limited to the following:

1. Written reprimand or warning
2. Removal from IPPS leadership position
3. Suspension of membership
4. Permanent expulsion from the IPPS
5. Denial or revocation of honors and awards
6. Notification to respondent's home institution
7. Publication/notification to members of incident in IPPS publications in cases of plagiarism of scientific misconduct
8. Suspension from attending or making presentations at IPPS events or sponsored events for a specific period, including permanently
9. Withdrawal/retraction of presentations, publication or posters
10. Publication of 'errata' notices
11. Placement of an author or reviewer on an IPPS watch list
12. Notification of other journals or relevant institutions
13. If the allegations are related to research misconduct or plagiarism and involve U.S. federally funded research or institutions other than the IPPS, the Board of Directors may choose to notify those institutions as well.

#### **4. APPEALS**

Once the Board of Directors has decided to take action(s) against the Respondent, the Respondent has 60 days to file an appeal of the sanction and/or the finding. An appeal must be based on NEW evidence or reconsideration of evidence and include a narrative justification for the appeal. The BOD will meet in Executive Session at its next scheduled meeting to review the appeal and sustain or revise its decision on the sanction or refer the appeal to the EPEC for reconsideration of the finding. That action will be documented for the record and will be communicated to the Respondent and EPEC within 10 days following the BOD meeting, when reasonably possible. EPEC may then have up to 90 days to reconsider the finding, any new evidence and decisions. EPEC may ask the BOD for an extension if necessary.

#### **5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The purpose of this section is to describe situations that may create a potential or actual conflict of interest, define the obligation to disclose such situations, and outline a process for handling a potential or actual conflict of interest. ***This policy applies to all Board members, committee members, task force members, other volunteers, speakers, consultants, all IPPS staff;*** and any other individuals who are required to comply with this policy by written agreement (each referred herein as "Covered Individual"). IPPS expects Covered Individuals to use sound judgment and good faith in identifying actual and potential conflicts of interest with the broad objective of disclosing any activity or position that may give rise to a conflict. Covered Individuals are required to follow both the letter and the spirit of this policy. In fulfilling their duties for IPPS, Covered Individuals must act in the best interests of IPPS and not in furtherance of personal or third-party interests. Covered Individuals have an obligation to ensure that IPPS maintains a biasfree decision-making process and to avoid all potential conflicts of interest.

Board members, staff, and committee members: A conflict of interest may arise when an individual has some interest or obligation that has the potential to create divided loyalty on the part of the individual's loyalty between IPPS and some other organization or cause. A conflict of interest may arise from a transaction between IPPS and a third party, or from an individual's volunteer, paid, or other financial relationship with a third party, which may compromise that individual's ability to provide unbiased judgment and undivided loyalty to IPPS. All Board members, staff, and committee members must disclose all actual or potential conflicts of interest

Annually, or more often if requested, each Covered Individual must complete and submit a Disclosure Form detailing all financial (equal to or above \$ 5000), business or other interest in any company, organization, service, product or other concerns that might affect or be affected by IPPS activities. In addition, the Covered Individual must disclose all such interests held by his or her family members and business associates of which he or she has knowledge. Family members include the person's spouse, domestic partner, children, parents and other members of the household. A business associate is someone with whom the Covered Individual has a business relationship. Examples of interests that must be disclosed include: ownership of stock (not including stocks held in blind trusts, mutual funds or exchange traded funds over which the individual has no control); substantial gifts; employment; consultancy arrangements; pharmaceutical investigation or research support; honoraria; or a volunteer position with another non-profit. If the Covered Individual has any uncertainty as to whether certain information should be disclosed, he or she should include that information in the disclosure. Each Covered Individual must update the Disclosure Form if any significant changes or additions to the submitted information arise during the course of the year.

Disclosed information shall be provided to the IPPS Chairperson, President and Executive Directors, and shared with the volunteer leadership, IPPS staff, and other parties responsible for or involved in the relevant activity or subject, as needed. Any Covered Individual who has an actual or potential conflict of interest in any proposed IPPS activity or subject shall remove him or herself from discussions and actions involving that subject, unless the IPPS Chairperson, President, or Executive Director requests the Covered Individual to participate. If there is uncertainty about whether a conflict of interest exists, the question shall be presented for determination by the Chairperson and Executive Director in consultation with legal counsel, as necessary. It is important that all individuals subject to the conflict of interest policy understand the importance of full cooperation with this policy to assure maximum integrity of IPPS activities.

## **6. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS**

It is preferred that allegations of misconduct be made within 12 months of the incident or within 60 days of the discovery of the incident. However, the IPPS, at its discretion may investigate older incidents on a case-by-case basis. All incidents will be considered individually and as such, there is no absolute IPPS statute of limitation for considering ethical issues.

## **7. INDEPENDENT ACTION BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

In cases where the Board of Directors believes that immediate action is needed because of the seriousness of the incident or where the reputation of the IPPS is at stake, they may act independently of EPEC. The action taken and sanctions levied must be documented for the record and a copy forwarded to the EPEC Chair.

## 8. CLOSURE AND TRACKING OF ALLEGATIONS AND DECISIONS

- i. Once action has been taken by the IPPS that issue is considered closed with the exception of a single appeal. The same issue may not be pursued independently through another IPPS process or entity after a decision is made or after appeal is concluded.
- ii. The EPEC chair and the IPPS Executive Director will be responsible for recording allegations and decisions in a secure database with access limited to their use and that of the Board of Directors. Reports of misconduct and harassment will be maintained for up to 10 years, to help address the issue of repeat offenders. A summary report of IPPS ethics cases (without specific descriptors or identifiers) and their disposition will be made available to the IPPS Board and membership annually.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was adapted with help from the following sources:

- The department of interior scientific and scholarly integrity policy (<http://www.doi.gov/scientific-integrity/index.cfm>)
- The American Geophysical Union scientific integrity and professional ethics Statement: <https://ethics.agu.org/files/2013/03/Scientific-Integrity-and-Professional-Ethics.pdf>
- Society for Human Resource Management: [https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/policies/pages/cams\\_000554.aspx](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/policies/pages/cams_000554.aspx).

**Figure 1. Process for investigating professional, behaviors or scientific misconduct**

