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CODE OF CONDUCT

RATIONALE

Purpose

The Obesity Society (TOS; formerly known as the North American Association for the Study of Obesity; NAASO) has a voluntary membership consisting of those in the pursuit of science, research, education, and clinical excellence. Society members are professionals and graduate students with specialized knowledge and skills. Members are expected to conduct their individual endeavors with competence and objectivity. As a professional society, our obligations are to our society colleagues and the public, which ultimately benefits by the work independently produced by our members.

As a professional society with a high level of public accountability, TOS is obligated to develop and adopt a code of conduct outlining its responsibilities and those of its members. This code of conduct reflects the values and principles that are strongly held by our varied professional disciplines and provides guidance to society members.

Scope

The principal function of TOS is to promote excellence in science, research, teaching, and clinical practice. Our responsibility includes the dissemination of information to our members; other professionals; organizations including the business community, industry, and government; and the general public. This dissemination is accomplished through our society meetings, publications, and continuing education opportunities. Our peer-review journal, *Obesity*, should reflect the code of conduct.

TOS is obligated to manage society funds responsibly. The election of TOS officials should be fair and democratic.

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Members will be kept informed of TOS activities including those of its committees. TOS will provide mechanisms for members to voice their complaints and concerns. Resolution of complaints and concerns will be in a timely manner. No decision by TOS will be based on sex, race, ethnicity, or disability of any member and no barriers will result from discrimination.

Members must agree and abide by the code of conduct. Respect for colleagues and assurance of privacy and confidentiality of research is expected at all times by all members. Integrity in performance and reporting of research and the recognition of collaborators and prior researchers is also expected. Standards for research from basic science in the laboratory to research in animals and humans must be of the highest quality because our members are engaged in the advancement of scientific knowledge and the betterment of public health.

Animals used for research should be treated respectfully and humanely. Studies involving human subjects should be conducted to the highest ethical standards, which includes but is not limited to following federal and local institutional review board policies. Safeguards should be applied to the use of databases of human subject data to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Conflicts of interest should be avoided at all levels of research; appropriate affiliations should be acknowledged. Members involved in clinical practice are responsible for treating patients with respect and maintaining patient privacy. Patients should be informed of all possible complication issues in language they can understand.

This code of conduct states the TOS position on the aforementioned issues of conduct.

CONDUCT

Research activities

Members are expected to do the following:

- Maintain high-quality professional competence through continued study of the latest techniques and research in obesity and related science fields.

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- Conduct research and other scholarly activities in accordance with recognized legal, scientific, ethical, and professional standards.
- Respect and protect the individual rights of both humans and animals and promote the ethical treatment of participants in research studies. This includes careful compliance with regulations of institutional review boards regarding human and animal research such as those detailed in United States Code of Federal Regulations Title 9 or Title 45, part 46 and other government regulations.
- Accurately communicate, conduct, and provide research services equitably to all individuals regardless of social or economic status, age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, diverse values, attitudes, or opinions.
- Be responsible and accountable for individual judgments and decisions about research.
- Call attention to unprofessional research services that result from incompetent, unethical, or illegal professional behavior.
- Contribute to the integrity of TOS by accurately communicating academic and other qualifications and by being responsive to and mutually communicative with colleagues and associates in research.

Public relations activities

TOS will not verify or provide assurances of professional or scientific competence and integrity for any of its members.

Members are expected to do the following:

- Not use their association with TOS for commercial purposes, such as advertisements or endorsements. Examples of acceptable use of their association are in a resume, biographical sketch, curriculum vitae, or list of professional accomplishments for the purpose of introduction as a speaker or at a professional meeting.
- Not promote personal opinions and views as the official position of TOS unless specifically commissioned by TOS to do so.

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- Not use the TOS logo or name on letterhead or elsewhere for advertisement purposes in conducting personal business.
- Participate in and encourage critical discourse to reflect the collective knowledge and practice within the obesity-related science fields to protect the public from misinformation, incompetence, and unethical acts.
- Provide the most current, scientifically supported, and relevant information concerning obesity and related scientific fields to the public through participation in interviews, lectures, presentations, and written publications sponsored by organizations, associations, and companies that share the TOS mission concerning the ethical treatment, health, and overall well-being of humans and animals.
- Promote obesity-related health and fitness and preventive, rehabilitative, and educational interventions grounded in a theoretical framework and supported by research.
- Respect and implement the Weight Bias Task Force recommendations regarding avoiding the use of pejorative language in TOS publications and programs.
- Participate in TOS efforts to promote high-quality research by avoiding covert conflicts of interest and acknowledging endorsements of products for financial gains in obesity-related science fields. This includes the following considerations:
 - If products are to be sold from a clinician's office, it is suggested that best medical care be the main purpose. Perceived conflict of interest for the sale of products from a clinician's office should be addressed.
 - Receiving gifts in kind or cash from commercial establishments or promoting commercial products or services that are not the primary business of a member are of particular concern.
 - A forthright declaration of conflict of interest is essential, for example, for stock ownership in a company that supports work, a partnership in a company whose

products are used in the author's study, and direct financial support from a company whose products or services are used in the author's work. In such cases, TOS recognizes that commercial entities contribute significantly to obesity research in various ways, including payments for services as consultants, honoraria for invited speakers, and research grants. A TOS member's financial gain from such interactions is possible. TOS believes that such interactions between commercial entities and TOS members contribute to the field of obesity and that legitimate remuneration need not taint professional opinion or judgment provided appropriate caution is exercised and disclosures made.

To address perceived or real conflict of interest, members should openly and readily identify all sources of direct or indirect financial support of their work or other conflicts of interest. To determine the appropriateness of a financial relationship, members should consider whether public disclosure would be embarrassing. If so, such relationships should be avoided or the conflicts should be declared forthrightly. Examples of such voluntary disclosures include acknowledgments in journal publications, abstract submissions, and public presentations. If economic interests are substantial enough to be in conflict with public interest, a TOS member should place the best interest of patients and obesity research ahead of economic interests.

Ad hominem attacks of any kind have no place in TOS. Thus, references to an individual's employer or sources of funding and income in the context of scholarly dialogue is unacceptable.

DISSEMINATION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Communicating the code to members

The code of conduct will be a part of the application for new members. New members will have to acknowledge that they have read and will abide by the code of conduct and that

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they are aware of the consequences outlined below in case of a breach of the code. Current members will be required to acknowledge the policy when they renew their membership.

The TOS office is responsible for implementing a plan to document agreement with this policy. The policy will be posted permanently and prominently on the TOS web site and will be published annually in *Obesity*.

Participants in TOS conferences and other events will be directed to the web site to familiarize themselves with the policy.

Violations of the code

Questions concerning violation of the code of conduct by a member should be presented to the TOS Council in a signed letter clearly stating the facts concerning the situation. *If the TOS Council determines that the facts, if true, would constitute a violation of the Code of Conduct, the matter shall be referred by majority vote to the Ethics Committee. The members of the Ethics Committee shall be polled to determine if any member has a personal or professional conflict of interest in evaluating the complaint. Any member of the Ethics Committee who has a conflict of interest shall be removed and the President shall appoint a replacement. The Ethics Committee shall have three persons to review the matter and shall provide the member who is the subject of the complaint an opportunity to offer evidence. Hearsay evidence will not be allowed. The party making the complaint shall not be required to submit to cross-examination by the subject of the complaint but shall respond to questions from the Committee. The Ethics Committee will act promptly (no more than 90 days from the date of referral) to make a finding and a recommendation for disciplinary action to the Council. The Council may review the Ethics Committee process and may agree or change the recommendation for disciplinary action. The Council may decide on no disciplinary action, a cease and desist order, limitation on service in the Society's offices or committees or termination of membership. A majority vote is necessary for approval of a disciplinary recommendation.*

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