

## **American College of Emergency Physicians**

### **Procedures for Addressing Charges of Ethical Violations and Other Misconduct**

Guiding Principle: Ethics charges and other disciplinary charges are important and will be addressed in accordance with College policy.

#### **A. Definitions**

1. ACEP means the American College of Emergency Physicians.
2. *Code of Ethics* means the *Code of Ethics for Emergency Physicians*.
3. *Procedures* means the *Procedures for Addressing Charges of Ethical Violations and Other Misconduct*.
4. Ethics Complaint Review Panel consists of three (3) members of the Ethics Committee and two (2) members of the Medical-Legal Committee – in matters requiring the expertise of a different committee, the President may appoint two (2) members of the relevant committee to replace the standing members of the Medical-Legal Committee.
5. Bylaws Committee refers to the Bylaws Committee or appointed subcommittee.
6. Board Hearing Panel conducts all hearings and consists of the ACEP Vice-President, Chair of the Board, and Board Liaison to the Ethics Committee.
7. ACEP review bodies are the Ethics Complaint Review Panel, the Bylaws Committee, the Board Hearing Panel and the ACEP Board of Directors.

#### **B. Complaint Received**

A complaint may be initiated by an ACEP member, chapter, committee, or section. No others have standing to present a complaint.

1. Must be in writing and signed by the complainant;
2. Must specify in reasonable detail an alleged violation by an ACEP member of an ACEP policy as it existed at the time of the alleged violation, including ACEP Bylaws, ACEP *Code of Ethics*, other ACEP ethics policies, or other conduct believed by the complainant to warrant censure, suspension, or expulsion;
3. Must allege a violation that occurred within ten (10) years prior to the submission of the complaint, is not the subject of pending litigation, and any rights of appeal have been exhausted or have expired;
4. Must state that the complainant has personal, first-hand knowledge or actual documentation of the alleged violation; substantiating documentation must accompany the complaint. Complainant is responsible for ensuring that the documentation does not provide information that can be used to identify a particular patient, including but not limited to, the patient's name, address, social security number, patient identification number, or any identifying information related to members of the patient's family;
5. Must state that the complainant is willing to have his or her name disclosed to the ACEP Executive Director, any additional ACEP review body listed in these *Procedures*, and the respondent should the complaint be forwarded to the respondent; and
6. Must be submitted to the ACEP Executive Director.

### C. Executive Director

1. a. If any elements of the complaint have not been met, returns the complaint and supporting documentation to complainant, identifying the elements that must be addressed in an ethics complaint.
- b. If all elements of the complaint have been met, sends a written acknowledgement to the complainant confirming complainant's intent to file a complaint. Includes a copy of ACEP's *Procedures* providing the guidelines and timetables that will be followed in this matter. Requests complainant sign acknowledgement specifying intent to file an ethics complaint and to be bound by the *Procedures*.
2. Confirms receipt of an acknowledgement signed by the complainant specifying intent to file an ethics complaint and to be bound by the *Procedures*.
3. Notifies the ACEP President and the Chair of the Ethics Committee or the Bylaws Committee, as appropriate, that a complaint has been filed and forwards to each of them a copy of the complaint.
4. a. Determines, in consultation with the ACEP President and the Chair of the Ethics Committee, the Bylaws Committee, or other committee designee, that the complaint is frivolous, inconsequential, or does not allege an actionable violation of a policy or principle included in the *Code of Ethics* or ACEP Bylaws, or other conduct warranting censure, suspension, or expulsion. If so, the Executive Director dismisses the complaint and will notify the complainant of this determination, or
- b. Determines, in consultation with the ACEP President and the Chair of the Ethics Committee, or other committee designee, that the complaint alleges conduct that may constitute a violation of a policy or principle included in the *Code of Ethics*, and if so, forwards the complaint and the response together, after both are received, to each member of the Ethics Complaint Review Panel, or
- c. Determines, in consultation with the ACEP President and the Chair of the Bylaws Committee, or other committee designee, that the complaint alleges conduct that may constitute a violation of ACEP Bylaws or other conduct justifying censure, suspension, or expulsion, and forwards the complaint and response together, after both are received, to each member of the Bylaws Committee, or at the discretion of the Chair of the Bylaws Committee, to members of a subcommittee of the Bylaws Committee appointed for that purpose, or
- d. Determines that the complaint is more appropriately addressed through judicial or administrative avenues, such as in the case of pending litigation or action by state licensing boards, and ACEP should defer actions pursuant to such other avenues. If so, the Executive Director will refer the matter to the ACEP President for review. If the President also determines that the complaint is more appropriately addressed through judicial or administrative avenues, the complaint will not be considered. The Ethics Complaint Review Panel or the Bylaws Committee will review the President's action. The President's action can be overturned by a majority vote of the applicable ACEP review body.
5. Within ten (10) business days after the determination specified in Section C.4.b. or Section C.4.c. of these *Procedures*, forwards the complaint to the respondent by USPS Certified

Mail with a copy of these *Procedures* and requests a written response within thirty (30) days of receipt of the documents. The communication will indicate that ACEP is providing notice of the complaint, the reasons for the review action, that no determination has yet been made on the complaint, and that the respondent has the right to request a hearing if the applicable ACEP review body decides not to dismiss the complaint. A copy of the complaint and all supporting documentation provided by the complainant will be included in this communication. Such notice must also include a summary of the respondent's rights in the hearing, and a list of the names of the members of the applicable ACEP review body, including the Board of Directors. The respondent will have the right to raise any issues of potential conflict or reason that any individuals should recuse themselves from the review. Such recusal shall be at the discretion of the ACEP President.

6. When a written response to a complaint is received, the Executive Director will forward that response and any further related documentation to the complainant and the Ethics Complaint Review Panel or the Bylaws Committee appointed to review the complaint, as appropriate.

**D. Ethics Complaint Review Process [within sixty (60) days of the forwarding of the complaint/response specified in Section C.4.b. above]**

1. Reviews the written record of any complaint that alleges a violation of the ACEP *Code of Ethics* or other ACEP ethics policies as they existed at the time of the alleged violation and the accompanying response.
2. Discusses the complaint and response by telephone conference call.
3. Determines the need to solicit in writing additional information or documentation from the parties, third parties, or experts regarding the complaint.
4. Considers whether:
  - a. Applicable version of the ACEP *Code of Ethics* or other ACEP ethics policies apply.
  - b. Alleged behavior constitutes a violation of the applicable version of the ACEP *Code of Ethics* or other ACEP ethics policies.
  - c. Alleged conduct warrants censure, suspension, or expulsion.
5. Decides to:
  - a. Dismiss the complaint; or
  - b. Ethics Complaint Review Panel renders a decision to impose disciplinary action based on the written record.
6. If the Ethics Complaint Review Panel determines to impose disciplinary action pursuant to Section D.5.b., the respondent will be provided with notification of the Ethics Complaint Review Panel's determination and the option of:
  - a. A hearing; or
  - b. The imposition of the Ethics Complaint Review Panel decision based solely on the written record.
7. If the respondent chooses the option described in Section D.6.b., that is, an Ethics Complaint Review Panel decision based solely on the written record, the Ethics Complaint Review Panel will implement its decision to impose disciplinary action based on the written record.

**E. Bylaws Complaint Review Process [within sixty (60) days of the forwarding of the complaint/response specified in Section C.4.c. above]**

1. Reviews the written record of any complaint that alleges a violation of the ACEP Bylaws as it existed at the time of the alleged violation and the accompanying response.
2. Discusses the complaint and response by telephone conference call.
3. Determines the need to solicit in writing additional information or documentation from the parties, third parties, or experts regarding the complaint.
4. Considers whether:
  - a. Applicable version of the ACEP Bylaws apply.
  - b. Alleged behavior constitutes a violation of the applicable version of the ACEP Bylaws.
  - c. Alleged conduct warrants censure, suspension, or expulsion.
5. Decides to:
  - a. Dismiss the complaint; or
  - b. Bylaws Committee renders a decision to impose disciplinary action based solely on the written record.
6. If the Bylaws Committee determines to impose disciplinary action pursuant to Section E.5.b., the respondent will be provided with notification of the Bylaws Committee's determination and the option of:
  - a. A hearing; or
  - b. The imposition of the Bylaws Committee's decision based solely on the written record.
7. If the respondent chooses the option described in Section E.6.b., that is, a Bylaws Committee decision based solely on the written record, the Bylaws Committee will implement its decision to impose disciplinary action based on the written record.

**F. Right of Respondent to Request a Hearing**

If the Ethics Complaint Review Panel or Bylaws Committee chooses to impose disciplinary action, the Executive Director will send to the respondent a written notice by USPS Certified Mail of the right to request a hearing. This notice will list the respondent's hearing rights as set forth in Section G. below. The respondent's request for a hearing must be submitted in writing to the Executive Director within thirty (30) days of receipt of the notice of right to a hearing. In the event of no response, the applicable ACEP review body will implement its final decision.

**G. Hearing Procedures**

1. If the respondent requests a hearing, the complainant and respondent will be notified in writing by USPS Certified Mail by the Executive Director within ten (10) business days of such request. Such notice will include a list of witnesses, if any, that the Board Hearing Panel intends to call in the hearing.
2. The Executive Director will send a notification by USPS Certified Mail of the date, time, and place of the hearing and will provide the parties with information regarding the hearing process and the conduct of the hearing.

3. The time set for the hearing will not be less than thirty (30) days nor more than nine (9) months after the date on which notice of hearing was received by the respondent.
4. The complainant and respondent each may be represented by counsel or any other person of their choice. Each party will bear the expense of his or her own counsel.
5. The parties have the right to have a record made of the proceedings by transcript, audiotape, or videotape at the expense of the requesting party.
6. The hearing will take place before the Board Hearing Panel. All members of the Board Hearing Panel must be present in person, except in circumstances in which it is impossible or commercially impracticable for the parties and the Board Hearing Panel to hold an in-person hearing, at which time the Board Hearing Panel may choose to hold a virtual hearing.
7. The parties to the complaint have the right to call, examine, and cross-examine witnesses and to present evidence that is determined to be relevant by the presiding officer, even if the evidence would not be admissible in a court of law. Respondent may submit a written statement at the close of the hearing. All witness expenses will be borne by the party who calls the witness.
8. The Board Hearing Panel will, after having given the complainant and the respondent an opportunity to be heard, including oral arguments and the filing of any written briefs, conclude the hearing.
9. The decision of the Board Hearing Panel will be expressed in a resolution that will be included in the minutes of the meeting at which the decision occurs. Written notice of the Board Hearing Panel's decision will be sent by USPS Certified Mail to the respondent and complainant within sixty (60) days of the decision. This written notice will include the Board Hearing Panel's decision and a statement of the basis for that decision.

#### **H. Notice to the Board of Directors**

At the next meeting of the ACEP Board of Directors, following a final determination regarding a complaint, the Board shall be presented with an outline of the steps taken by the applicable ACEP review body in its review of the complaint. The Board shall review the *Procedures* used in the complaint review process but will not review the facts or merits of the case. Should the Board decide these *Procedures* were not followed appropriately, it will remand the case back to the reviewing committee or panel to correct the procedural error.

#### **I. Possible Disciplinary Action and Disclosure to ACEP Members**

1. Nature of Disciplinary Action
  - a. Censure
    - i. Private Censure: a private letter of censure informs a member that his or her conduct does not conform with the College's ethical standards; it may detail the manner in which ACEP expects the member to behave in the future and may explain that, while the conduct does not, at present, warrant public censure or more severe disciplinary action, the same or similar conduct in the future may warrant a

more severe action. Upon written request by a member of ACEP, ACEP may confirm the censure; however, contents of the letter will not be provided.

- ii. Public Censure: a public letter of censure shall detail the manner in which the censured member has been found to violate the College's ethical standards set forth in Section B.2. above. The censure shall be announced in an appropriate ACEP publication. The published announcement shall also state which ACEP policy or Bylaws provision was violated by the member and shall inform ACEP members that they may request further information about the disciplinary action.
  - b. Suspension from ACEP membership shall be for a period of twelve (12) months; the dates of commencement and completion of the suspension shall be determined by the ACEP President. At the end of the twelve (12) month period of suspension, the suspended member may request reinstatement. Request for reinstatement shall be processed in the same manner as that of any member whose membership has lapsed (i.e., has been cancelled for non-payment of dues). The suspension shall be announced in an appropriate ACEP publication. The published announcement shall also state which ACEP policy or Bylaws provision was violated by the member and shall inform ACEP members that they may request further information about the disciplinary action. ACEP is also required to report the suspension from membership and a description of the conduct that led to the suspension to the Board of Medical Examiners in the states in which the physician is licensed which may result in a report of such action to the National Practitioner Data Bank.
  - c. Expulsion from ACEP membership shall be for a period of five (5) years, after which the expelled member may petition the Board of Directors for readmission to membership. The decision regarding such a petition shall be entirely at the discretion of the Board of Directors. The expulsion shall be announced in an appropriate ACEP publication. The published announcement shall also state which ACEP policy or Bylaws provision was violated by the member and shall inform ACEP members that they may request further information about the disciplinary action. ACEP is also required to report the expulsion from membership and a description of the conduct that led to expulsion to the Boards of Medical Examiners in the states in which the physician is licensed which may result in a report of such action to the National Practitioner Data Bank.
2. Scope and Manner of Disclosure
- a. Disclosure to ACEP Members: Any ACEP member may transmit a request for information to the Executive Director regarding disciplinary actions taken by the College. Such letter shall specify the name of the member or former member who is the subject of the request. The Executive Director shall disclose, in writing, the relevant information as described in Section I.1.
  - b. Disclosure to Non-Members: If a non-member makes a request for information about disciplinary actions against a member who has received public censure, suspension, or expulsion, the Executive Director shall refer that person to the published announcement of that disciplinary action in an ACEP publication. No further information shall be provided.

## **J. Ground Rules**

1. All proceedings are confidential until a final decision on the complaint is rendered by the applicable ACEP review body, at which time the decision will be available upon request by ACEP members, to the extent specified in Section I. Files of these proceedings, including written submissions and hearing record will be kept confidential.
2. Timetable guidelines are counted by calendar days unless otherwise specified.
3. The Ethics Complaint Review Panel, the Bylaws Committee, or the Board Hearing Panel, may request further written documentation from either party to the complaint; a time to satisfy any request will be specified in the notice of such request, and these times will not count against the ACEP review body's overall time to complete its task.
4. All parties to the complaint are responsible for their own costs; ACEP will pay its own administrative and committee costs.
5. If a participant in this process (such as a member of the Ethics Complaint Review Panel, the Bylaws Committee, or the Board Hearing Panel) is a party to the complaint, has a material reason for bias, subjectivity, or conflicts of interest in the matter, or is in direct economic competition with the respondent, that person shall recuse himself or herself from the process except as a complaining party or respondent, at which time the ACEP President will appoint a replacement.
6. Once the Ethics Complaint Review Panel or the Bylaws Committee has made a decision on a complaint, it will not consider additional allegations against the same respondent based on the same or similar facts.
7. The Ethics Complaint Review Panel or the Bylaws Committee's decision to impose an adverse action must be based on a reasonable belief that the action is warranted by the facts presented or discovered in the course of the disciplinary process.
8. If a respondent fails to respond to a complaint, to a notice of the right to request a hearing, or to a request for information, the Ethics Complaint Review Panel, the Bylaws Committee, or the Board Hearing Panel may make a decision on the complaint solely on the basis of the information it has received.
9. If a respondent seeks to voluntarily resign his/her ACEP membership after ACEP has received a complaint against that respondent, that request for resignation will not be accepted by ACEP until the complaint has been resolved. For the purposes of this provision, non-payment of ACEP member dues will be interpreted as a request for resignation.

**Approved 2020**