ESSM Code of Conduct

Introduction

Membership in the European Society for Sexual Medicine (ESSM) entails a commitment to uphold the Society's mission, values, and bylaws. This Code outlines the ethical, scientific, and professional standards expected of all members, ESSM events' participants, staff, contractors, and co-operators, whether activities occur in-person, online, or at ESSM-organized or co-organized events.

Purpose

- Promote the highest standards of professionalism and scientific integrity
- Safeguard ESSM's reputation and values
- Ensure an inclusive, respectful, and safe environment
- Support compliance with applicable laws and ESSM's internal governance

This Code complements, but does not override, national or international laws and ESSM policies.

Core Principles

Respect, Inclusion, and Non-Discrimination

ESSM fosters a culture of dignity, equity, and mutual respect. Discrimination or harassment based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, political belief, socioeconomic status, disability, age, or sexual orientation constitutes a violation of this code and may result in disciplinary actions.

All members and participants must:

- Treat others with respect and professionalism
- Embrace diversity and inclusive collaboration
- Avoid biased or offensive language and actions
- Report inappropriate or discriminatory behavior
- Cooperate fully with investigations
- Be open to feedback regarding their own conduct

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Professional Integrity

ESSM members are expected to:

• Uphold principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice

• Be transparent in all professional activities including disclosure of potential conflicts of interest in research, publishing, and industry partnerships

• Avoid plagiarism, inappropriate authorship, and exploitation

• Acknowledge others' contributions

• Take responsibility for their work and decisions

• Engage in continuous professional development

Consent

Consent is essential in all interactions—professional, social, flirtatious, or sexual. It must be voluntary, informed, clear, and mutual.

Consent must be:

• Voluntary – given freely without pressure or coercion

• Clear and enthusiastic – silence, past relationships, or lack of resistance do not imply consent

• Reversible – can be withdrawn at any time

• Informed – not valid if one party is impaired or incapacitated

Clarifications:

• Flirting, clothing, gifts, or invitations do not equal consent

• Consent to one act does not imply consent to another

• Consent must be obtained every time

Violations of consent will be treated seriously and may lead to formal sanctions, including suspension or termination of membership.

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Reporting and Disciplinary Procedures

ESSM encourages timely and responsible reporting of misconduct. Alleged violations should be reported to the ESSM Secretariat Office (see below) or to any member of the ESSM Executive Committee. Reports may be submitted confidentially or anonymously and will be reviewed through a fair and impartial process.

ESSM Complaints Procedure

Step 1: Submission of Complaint

Who: Any individual (member or non-member)

How:

• Email to the ESSM Secretariat Office: **admin@essm.org** or to any individual member of the ESSM Executive Committee

• Anonymous submissions accepted (may limit investigation)

Include:

• Description of misconduct

• Names, dates, locations

• Any supporting documentation

Step 2: Acknowledgement and Preliminary Review

Timeline: Within 14 days

Review by: ESSM Officers or subcommittee of Executive Committee

Outcome:

• Proceed to investigation

• Dismiss with documented rationale if outside scope or lacking information

Step 3: Formal Investigation

Timeline: Begin within 30 days; conclude within 90 days; in case of need for additional time, parties will be informed accordingly.

Process:

• An ad hoc ethics committee will be appointed, including (but not limited to) three past ESSM presidents

• Respondent will be notified and invited to respond

• All relevant statements and materials will be gathered

• Confidentiality will be ensured unless legal obligations require disclosure

Step 4: Resolution and Outcome

Deliberation: Ethics committee reviews findings and determines outcome

Possible outcomes:

• Dismissal

• Informal resolution (e.g., apology or clarification)

• Formal sanctions:

- Formal warning

- Temporary suspension of membership

- Termination of membership (in accordance with ESSM bylaws)

Communication: Both parties will be informed in writing, respecting privacy

Step 5: Appeal

Who: Either party may appeal within 14 days

Review by: Executive Committee members not involved in original case

Timeline: Final decision within 30 days

Step 6: Record-Keeping and Follow-Up

• All cases are securely documented and retained for at least 5 years

• Follow-up actions may be taken to ensure compliance and prevent recurrence

Protection Against Retaliation

ESSM strictly prohibits retaliation against anyone who reports misconduct in good faith or participates in an investigation. Retaliation will be treated as a separate disciplinary matter.