



## AAPM Code of Ethics: Past, Present and Future

A Presentation of Task Group No. 109: Code of Ethics

## The Purpose of this Presentation

The AAPM's Code of Ethics (Professional Policy 24) is being reviewed by TG-109.

The review may lead to a revision.

TG-109 needs to know what you think of your Code of Ethics.



## Outline

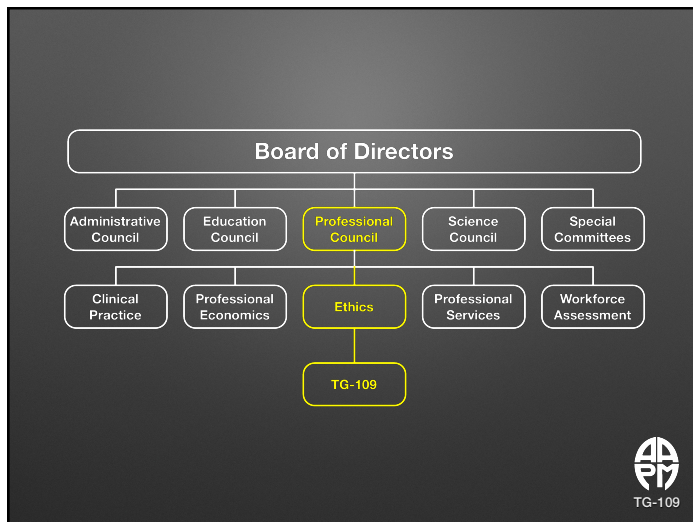
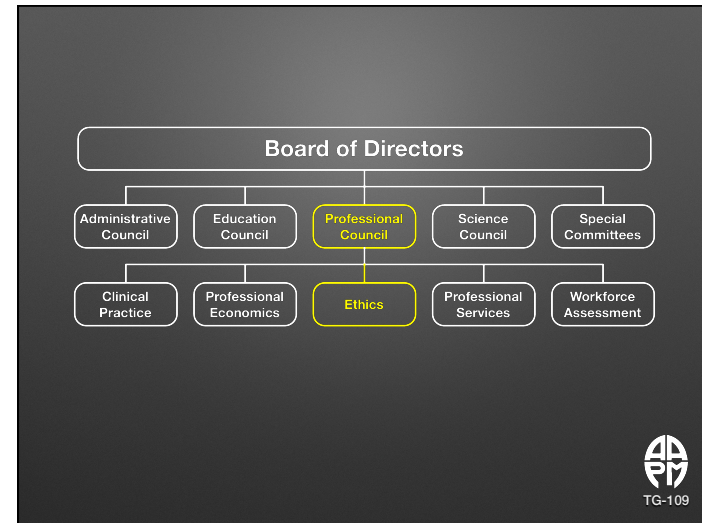
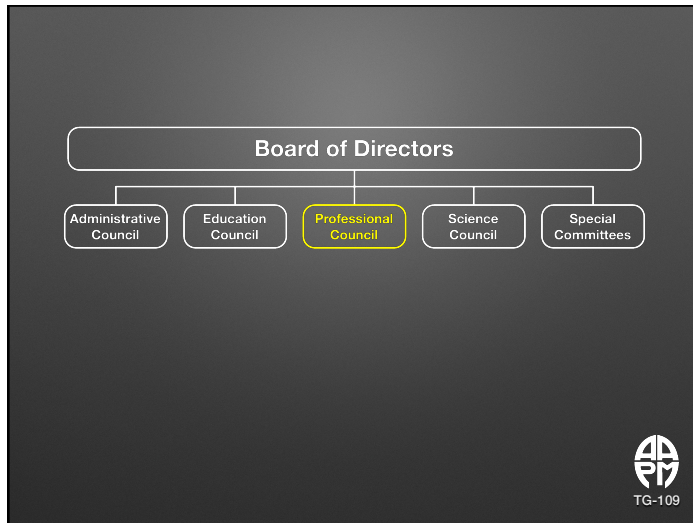
- What is the Ethics Committee? What does it do?
- What is the Code of Ethics?
- What does the Code of Ethics say?
- Why is the Code of Ethics being reviewed/revised?
- How can an AAPM Member influence the review and revision?



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## Ethics in AAPM Governance

Rule 3.7.2: The Committee on Ethics

### Purpose

The Committee on Ethics shall advise the Professional Council and, through it, the Board of Directors, on matters relating to the ethical practice of medical physics.

### Activities

1. Prepare guidelines on the ethical practice of medical physics.
2. Investigate complaints involving alleged unethical practices of medical physics by or relating to AAPM members.
3. Prepare and maintain procedures for resolving ethical problems.
4. Educate the medical physics community on the ethical principles of professional practice

## Ethics in AAPM Governance

### Rule 4.0.2: Ethical Behavior

All applicants for membership and affiliation must attest that they will abide by the AAPM Code of Ethics.

### Rule 4.0.3: Termination of membership or affiliation for ethical misconduct

Sanctions specified within the AAPM Code of Ethics (up to and including expulsion from the AAPM) may be imposed for ethical misconduct. Members or affiliates expelled for ethical misconduct may eventually reapply for membership or affiliation as specified in the Code of Ethics.



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## Ethics in AAPM Governance

### Bylaws Article IV, Section 4. Termination of Membership

The membership of any member shall terminate upon occurrence of any of the following events: resignation of the member; use of degrees from non-accredited institutions or programs as defined in this Article; nonpayment of dues as specified in the Rules; or vote of the Board of Directors **following a formal hearing by the Ethics Committee** as specified in the Rules. Reinstatement of membership shall be as defined in the Rules.



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## Ethics in AAPM Governance

### POLICY ID: PP-17B: Scope of Practice of Clinical Medical Physics

Definition 3.6: Qualified Medical Physicist (QMP) is an individual who is competent to practice independently in one or more of the subfields of medical physics, and meets the criteria set forth in the Definition of a Qualified Medical Physicist (AAPM Professional Policy 1). In addition, a QMP must hold a professional medical physics license where required and **should uphold the AAPM Code of Ethics (AAPM Professional Policy 24)**.



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## Ethics Committee Activity

- Fewer than 10 complaints are received in a typical year.
- Most complaints are resolved by the Chair through a combination of advice, admonition and mediation.
- Some complaints are not pursued by the complainant for administrative reasons, such as a desire to remain anonymous.
- A few complaints a year go to the full Committee for discussion and further action, often resulting only in letters of advice or admonition.
- It has been many years since a complaint resulted in recommendation of a formal Board action.



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## Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics defines the standards and the procedures by which the Ethics Committee operates.

More broadly, the Code of Ethics is designed to give AAPM Members an ethical compass to guide the conduct of their professional affairs.



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## Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics in its current form was approved in 2008 and replaced several earlier Policy documents, notably the Guidelines for Ethical Practice for Medical Physicists (PP8), but also others of more limited scope; reviewing the work of others (PP5), vacating a position (PP4) and the formal complaint process (PP21).

The current Code was created to centralize and systematize AAPM's ethics-related policies and procedures.



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## Structure of the Code

- Preamble and statement of general principles
- Guidelines applicable to specific situations
  - Professional conduct
  - Research ethics
  - Education ethics
  - Business/Government ethics
- Detailed formal complaint process



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## Code of Ethics

"The following Principles of the American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM) are core values intended to aid all members and affiliates to act in an ethically professional manner. The Principles are not a set of laws, but standards of ethical conduct. The Principles provide a framework for members and affiliates to conduct themselves with respect to patients, colleagues, and the public."

*Preamble*



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## The Code says...

- We need to honor the trust placed in us by the patients that we ultimately serve.
- We need to be honest in all of our professional dealings and treat each other with respect.
- We need to be aware of our limitations of knowledge and skills; seek assistance as needed and strive to improve ourselves.



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## Examples of guidelines

### *Professional Conduct*

- "Members must be aware of the limitations of their knowledge, skill, and experience. They shall undertake only work that they are qualified to perform and shall seek additional education and training or consultation when indicated. Members should disclose known limitations in their ability when relevant."

### *Teaching/Mentoring*

- "Teachers shall interact with students in a respectful manner. Teachers are in a position of power and authority. They have the responsibility to relate with students in a positive manner. Their verbal, nonverbal, and written communication with students should be constructive and reasoned with the intent to enhance the education experience."



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## Examples of guidance

### *Research*

- "Authorship of a scientific publication should be reserved for only those individuals who have contributed substantially to the conception and design of a research investigation and/or to the analysis and interpretation of data resulting from the investigation. Authorship also implies that the individual was directly involved in the drafting and revising of the publication. Authors are discouraged from awarding authorship to an individual if the individual did not contribute substantially to the publication."

### *Business*

- "It is considered good and responsible professional practice during an employment investigation to act with respect and consideration of the existing parties and of their relationship(s) specifically, the employer and any fellow medical physicist whose position might be affected."



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## Complaint process

- The complaint process is specified in detail and at length in the Code of Ethics.
- It is designed above all to be fair to everyone involved in a complaint.
- The complaint process is not efficient. That is also by design. Deliberation and review are important aspects of due diligence.
- There is intentionally broad latitude in the sanctions that can be recommended by the Ethics Committee.



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## Sunset

- The Code of Ethics is managed as a Professional Policy.
- Professional Policies are developed by Professional Council as recommendations to the Board. A Board vote is required to approve.
- Each AAPM Policy has a “sunset date” by which it must be renewed or allowed to expire.
- PP 24-C was approved 11/26/2012 with a sunset date of 12/31/2017.



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## Structure of TG-109 work

- The TG has been reconstituted in 2015 as the management team of the review process and possible revision.
- The TG membership represents diverse professional demographics but is not intended to be all-inclusive.
- Phase 1 is feedback collection, reaching out broadly to the general Membership as well as to targeted Members identified with specific professional demographics.



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## Structure of TG-109 work

- Phase 2, systematic review of responses will begin formally at the 2015 Annual Meeting.
- Phase 3, a final determination will be made as to whether major revision is indicated.
- If not, minor revisions will be made by the TG and forwarded for review.
- If yes, Phase 4, the scope of revision and a workplan will be clearly defined by the TG. At that time the membership of the TG may be augmented with domain experts to assist in the writing.



## Structure of TG-109 work

- The TG intends to solicit Member comment on draft revisions at the appropriate stages of the work.
- If a revision is undertaken it will be presented for Ethics Committee review by early 2017.



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## Member feedback is crucial.

- Concerns about the process or outcome of prior Complaints
- Concerns about content or form of the existing Code
- Omissions of scope or detail
- Overreach of scope or detail
- Scope or content that is outdated by evolution in the practice environment
- Other concerns



## TG-109 Points of Contact

- Informational Article in March/April Newsletter
- Online survey on AAPM Homepage or at  
<http://www.aapm.org/announcements/CodeofEthicsSurvey.asp>
- Presentations to Chapters and at other meetings to inform and interact with as many members as possible



## Contact Information

If you have comments or concerns that Task Group 109 should consider not covered by the Survey, please contact:

**Christina Skourou, Chair of TG-109**

**Email:** [Christina.Skourou@slh.ie](mailto:Christina.Skourou@slh.ie)

**Or any of the Task Group members.**

