

Professional Code of Conduct

What is your definition of professional behavior? When describing surgical technologists, the term refers to behavior exhibited in practice and within the profession toward our fellow members. While practitioners perform an excellent job maintaining professional behavior with surgeons and nurses in the O.R., how do we achieve that level of professionalism as individuals and an organization?

Our current Code of Ethics establishes ethical standards for our profession related to patient care as practitioners; however, it does not address our professional behavior as individuals in our organization or toward fellow members. The *AST Policy and Procedure Manual* and the *AST Bylaws* provide specific guidelines and general provisions for professional behavior and conflict of interest. Neither document, however, addresses the specific behaviors defined by the Board as important to the organization and membership.

During the AST Board of Directors annual meeting, April 13–14, 2007, this topic was addressed, and the Board adopted the AST Professional Code of Conduct and the AST Protocol for Review of Conduct Violations, and subsequently incorporated them into the *AST Policy and Procedure Manual*.

The purpose of the Professional Code of Conduct is to inspire pro-

fessional behavior among members and staff. In enacting this policy, the Board has provided the standards of professional behavior necessary to achieve that purpose.

This code is a living and breathing document that will be updated, as needed. The principles of this code are specific concerning expectations of AST members, leaders, state assemblies, and staff. Although most already follow these principles, there are some who may need to reconsider how they treat fellow members or how they represent their state and national organization.

The protocol for reviewing violations provides a fair review to any individual accused of unprofessional conduct. Anonymous allegations will not be investigated. In adopting the protocol for review, the policy provides the individual with due process before a decision is made by the Board. Any allegation must be submitted in writing to the Board to initiate a review, and the individual will be provided with a reasonable amount of time to respond. The entire Board of Directors will be involved to ensure the protocol is being followed, and the matter is handled fairly. If the individual is determined to have violated the Professional Code of Conduct, the Board has a variety of options.

The specific points outlined in the code encourage treating fellow members with fairness and respect,

while refraining from behaviors considered unprofessional. The responsibility to hold all members to the same code will improve unity of our membership. Ensuring positions of power are not abused or used for personal gain will ensure all members receive equal opportunity for success within our organization.

The Professional Code of Conduct promotes a positive environment of professional behavior in AST, provides a guide for members to follow when joining, and establishes a standard of professionalism that protects individuals from potential false allegations. The review process is fair and has a timeline to handle allegations in a timely manner. Both the code and protocol for review were established after researching codes of conduct and codes of ethical behavior of other professional organizations. The level of professionalism desired and how to ensure it is achieved were major considerations, as well.

The code and protocol will be sent to all state assemblies and will be included in the *State Assembly Manual* that has been updated recently. State assemblies are required to implement these policies immediately and are responsible for handling violations of the code at the state level. The national Board of Directors is responsible for appointed and elected positions, while the AST chief executive officer is responsible for any staff violations.

Please see the Professional Code of Conduct and the Protocol for Review of Code of Conduct Violations that precede this article. The Board is interested in your feedback about the new policies. Please contact the AST Board at board@ast.org to share your opinions or obtain information about the new policies.