

ASHG Code of Ethics

In an effort to make clear to all that the members of the ASHG subscribe to the highest scientific and professional standards, the Board of Directors asked a committee (Professional Ethics) to create a brief document that captured the spirit of scientific integrity and professionalism. The Board of Directors approved the final document at the meeting in Washington, DC, in March 2006. It is a major responsibility of professional organizations to nurture the public trust, just as it is the responsibility of the scientific community to earn and maintain that trust.

Ethylin Wang Jabs, M.D., chaired the group, and Bartha Maria Knoppers, L.L.D.; Daniel Van Dyke, Ph.D.; Vivian Weinblatt, M.S.; Helga Toriello, Ph.D.; and Barbara McGillivray, Ph.D. served on the committee that developed the document. This group worked over a 2-year period, studying other society statements. The statement is available on the ASHG Web site (<http://www.ashg.org/>) and is included below in its entirety.

The committee and the Board have discussed at length the issue of repercussions of unacceptable behavior by an ASHG member, and they determined that, since ASHG is a scientific membership organization, it is not within the purview of a committee or the Board to take any preemptive actions or to conduct investigations. Should an institution, the federal government (i.e., through the Office of Research Integrity), the American College of Medical Genetics, another practice organization, or the legal system take action against an ASHG member, the Board of Directors does maintain the right to cancel an individual's membership in ASHG. Special circumstances may prevail, and the Society President may appoint a special work group to develop a statement in response to an especially egregious or visible situation. This is expected to occur rarely, if ever.

The Board and the members of ASHG are indebted to this committee for its work and serious attention to this matter. If there are questions about the document, please contact the Executive Vice President (jboughman@ashg.org).

American Society of Human Genetics Code of Ethics

The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) is a membership organization that includes multidisciplinary professionals with a common interest in human genetic research and clinical practice. Society members contribute to the advancement of science for the benefit of health.

The Code of Ethics provides an ethical framework for members as they work to further the aims of ASHG. Members act in a manner consistent with the good reputation of the Society. Members do not represent the Society as such. This Code of Ethics does not replace the ethical or legal obligations of individual members as set by their own professional bodies, employers, or applicable legislation.

Advancement of Science

Members advance both fundamental and applied knowledge in human genetics for the benefit of the public.

Improvement of health care.—Promote public health, through the advancement of human genetic research and the provision of high quality genetic services.

Training.—Educate employees, students, and professionals to follow responsible research practice and genetic services, consistent with the highest ethical standards. Treat trainees with respect and provide them with opportunities for professional growth and development.

Collaboration.—Share knowledge in research, practice, and ethics through publication, professional meetings, and conferences. Encourage interprofessional and international collaboration for the benefit of health care. Meet applicable ethical and legal standards while conducting collaborations.

Integrity

Members comply with the highest ethical standards such as honesty and courtesy. They conduct themselves with appropriate behavior and attitudes.

Maintain professional competence.—Advance their knowledge and understanding of new scientific developments and emerging areas of practice through ongoing education and training.

Respect professional codes of ethics.—Abide by the prevailing ethical and legal norms of their profession.

Objectivity.—Approach professional activities with an unbiased attitude, gathering evidence fairly and precisely.

Accountability.—Act responsibly toward colleagues, government, corporate sponsors, the wider health care community and the public at large. Build public trust through accountability.

Collegiality.—Treat colleagues and researchers with respect and courtesy, based on principles of equality and mutual respect for those with differing worldviews or from different cultures. Share ideas honestly, giving proper credit for others' contributions to their work.

Privacy

Members protect the privacy of the individual, especially in light of concerns over possible discrimination and confidentiality of medical information.

Confidentiality.—Respect the confidential nature of all information entrusted to them. Disclose personal health information with proper and specific authority through the consent of the individual or where there is a legal, ethical or professional right or duty to disclose.

Storage and security.—Maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of personal health information.

Transparency

Members act fairly and provide complete, accurate and timely information to their colleagues, to the public, and to the media.

Professionalism.—Claim expertise in fields where they have the

necessary depth of knowledge, especially when interacting with patients, or contributing to public discussion or policy debate. Do not make statements that are false, deceptive, or fraudulent concerning research, practice, or other work activities, or those of persons or groups with whom they are affiliated.

Conflicts of interest.—Disclose any potential conflicts of interest. Safeguard the quality and credibility of their professional judgment.

Diffusion of results.—Report findings, accurately and completely, without distortion and in a timely manner. Present personal opin-

ions as such and not as those of the Society.

Public education.—Foster public understanding of the nature and objectives of human genetics consistent with open and responsible use of human genetic findings in science and health care.

Approved March, 2006, by the ASHG Board of Directors.

JOANN A. BOUGHMAN
Executive Vice President
American Society of Human Genetics