As neurosurgeons, we are dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of professionalism. This applies to our interactions with patients, colleagues, and others. Maintaining these high standards requires ongoing professional development facilitated through annual conferences, educational courses, and other meetings. Annual conferences, educational courses, and other meetings draw a diverse community of individuals, yet also create a unique environment without the traditional guard rails. Unlike events held at one’s home institution, clear rules and jurisdiction have not been universally established. To promote the open exchange of ideas, as well as an environment conducive to professional growth of all participants, the leading neurological professional organizations joined to delineate the expectations for anyone who participates in sponsored events. The One Neurosurgery Summit Taskforce on Professionalism and Harassment developed a foundational policy that establishes common expectations for behavior and a unified roadmap for the prompt response to untoward events. We hope that publishing this policy will inspire other medical organizations to establish their own meeting and conference policies. More importantly, we wish to bring greater attention to everyone’s responsibility for ensuring a safe and respectful space for education, scientific debate, and networking during organized events.

https://thejns.org/doi/abs/10.3171/2021.1.JNS218000

KEYWORDS professionalism; harassment; conferences; policy; education; conduct; neurosurgery

Developing a professionalism and harassment policy for organized neurosurgery

Ellen L. Air, MD, PhD,1 Katie O. Orrico, JD,2 Deborah L. Benzil, MD,3 Alan M. Scarrow, MD, JD,4 James R. Bean, MD,5 Catherine A. Mazzola, MD,6 Linda M. Liu, MD, PhD, MBA,7 James T. Rutka, MD, PhD,8,9 and Karin M. Muraszko, MD9,10

1Department of Neurosurgery, Henry Ford Health System, Detroit, Michigan, USA; 2Washington Office, American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons, Washington, District of Columbia, USA; 3Department of Neurosurgery, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, USA; 4Mercy Health System, Springfield, Missouri, USA; 5Baptist Health Lexington, Lexington, Kentucky, USA; 6New Jersey Pediatric Neuroscience Institute, Morristown, New Jersey, USA; 7Department of Neurosurgery, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA Health, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA; 8Department of Neurosurgery, The Hospital for Sick Children, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; 9Department of Neurosurgery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA; 10Chair of the Professionalism and Harassment Taskforce

© 2021 The authors, CC BY-NC 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)
the One Neurosurgery Summit Taskforce on Professionalism and Harassment (Taskforce). We began by committing to the establishment of common expectations for behavior and a unified roadmap for the prompt response to untoward events. While each organization must formally adopt policies in accordance with individual by-laws or charters, we nevertheless wished to affirm our unified standards for professional behavior that should apply at all events sanctioned by one of the organizations.

The Taskforce then looked to other organizations to learn from their experience. The American Astronomical Society has been at the forefront of these issues, having formally adopted its initial anti-harassment policy in January 2008. In this document, the group set forth clear definitions of misconduct and a pathway for reporting/adjudication. Despite this foundational work, broader adoption of policies has been slow. The technology and open-source computing fields were the next to take on the mantle. In 2010, the Ada Initiative and Geek Feminism wiki published an example conference policy online, providing it to the public domain for free adoption by any organization that wished to do so. This spawned the adoption of conference policies across the technology field, with well more than 100 published policies by 2015.

The American Medical Association (AMA), the largest organization of physicians and medical students, adopted its “Anti-Harassment Policy” in 2017. This policy specifically expanded the AMA’s code of conduct to apply to conferences and other events sponsored by the organization. To our knowledge, the AMA remains among a small number of medical organizations to have established policies that apply to medical meetings and conferences.

The Taskforce leaned heavily on these and other resources in developing our policy. In addition to setting forth clear standards of behavior, we wanted to make clear that these expectations extend to satellite events, regardless of being directly sanctioned by the host organization. Moreover, the Taskforce wished to create the foundation of a fair and efficient process for addressing complaints without fear of retaliation. Though each organization’s harassment policies will vary by necessity, the unified approach taken with this One Neurosurgery Summit model policy should be interpreted as a clear statement that organized neurosurgery will not tolerate harassment in any form. That the leading neurological organizations unanimously endorsed this model policy reflects the understanding that individual neurological organizations would create specific policies and procedures unique to their needs and capabilities.

We hope that publishing this policy (Supplemental Digital Content) will inspire other medical organizations to establish their own meeting and conference policies. More importantly, we wish to bring greater attention to everyone’s responsibility for ensuring a safe and respectful space for education, scientific debate, and networking during organized events.

References

Disclosures
The authors have no personal, financial, or institutional interest in any of the drugs, materials, or devices described in this article.

Supplemental Information
Online-Only Content
Supplemental material is available with the online version of the article. This document has also been published at aans.org, americanaacadmys.org, abns.org, sns.org, and cns.org.


Dual Publication
In order to encourage dissemination of the “Developing a Professionalism and Harassment Policy for Organized Neurosurgery” and associated “One Neurosurgery Summit Professionalism and Harassment Model Policy” (Supplemental Digital Content) this article has been published jointly by both Neurosurgery and the Journal of Neurosurgery.

Correspondence
Ellen L. Air: Henry Ford Health System, Detroit, MI. eairl@hfhs.org.