

American Society of Nephrology

ASN Policy on Research Misconduct

The mission of the American Society for Nephrology (ASN) is to prevent, treat, and cure kidney diseases throughout the world by educating health professionals and scientists, advancing research and innovation, communicating new knowledge, and advocating for the highest quality care for patients.

ASN considers scientific integrity essential to all research endeavors. The ASN Policy on Research Misconduct governs all ASN members, staff, volunteers, and non-members participating in any research program operated under the direction of ASN or conducted by ASN. The policy includes standards for professional behavior, and processes for reporting and addressing violations.

Policies related to publishing peer reviewed studies are addressed by ASN journals through the [ASN Publications scientific misconduct policy](#), and policies related to ASN-funded research but not ASN-conducted research are governed by the [ASN Grants Program scientific misconduct policy](#).

Free, open, and responsible practice of science is fundamental to scientific advancement and improving kidney health. It is the responsibility of all individuals covered under the ASN Policy on Research Misconduct to ensure the integrity of scientific endeavor.

Individuals engaged in ASN's research programs must conduct research with honesty and integrity, and must exhibit professional courtesy, equity, and fairness in working with others.

1. Requirements for conducting research on behalf of ASN

All persons engaging in research on behalf of ASN will:

- Act with honesty in the interest of the advancement of science, take full responsibility for the trustworthiness of their research and its dissemination, and treat others with courtesy, equity, and fairness.
- Adhere to laws and regulations related to the professional conduct of research; to ASN's policies on publications, peer review, scientific integrity, conflict of interest, as well as ASN's policies barring discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Apply established research methods to the best of their understanding and ability, base conclusions on critical analysis of the evidence, and report findings and interpretations fully, accurately, and objectively, including characterization of uncertainties.
- Maintain confidentiality of all records in accordance with established scientific standards and, in the case of Patient Health Information (PHI), the [U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability ACT \(HIPAA\)](#).
- Maintain clear, accurate records of research in ways that will allow verification and replication of their work by others.

- Take responsibility for the integrity of their contributions to all publications, funding applications, reports, and other representations of their research.
- Acknowledge the names and roles of those who made significant contributions (such as ideas and scientific discussion) to the research.

2. Conflict of Interest

- Anyone considering engaging in research on behalf of ASN will disclose to ASN financial, personal, professional, and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work on research proposals, presentations or any public communications regarding the research conducted. The final decision regarding whether those interests represent conflicts that can be managed or must be divested if the person is to engage in research on behalf of ASN is ASN's, as represented by the ASN Executive Vice President (EVP) and any members of the ASN Council the ASN EVP chooses to engage in this decision.

3. Conduct of Research and Professional Behavior

Anyone engaging in research on behalf of ASN:

- Must read and understand this policy before beginning said research, and follow the procedures herein to report any suspected research misconduct, including fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, discrimination, harassment, bullying, or other irresponsible research practices that undermine the trustworthiness of research and a professional environment for the conduct of research.
- Have an ethical obligation to weigh the societal benefits of their research against the costs and risks to human and animal welfare, heritage sites, or other potential impacts on the environment and society. (Guidance – relevant policies).
- Will not engage in discrimination, harassment, bullying, dishonesty, fraud, misrepresentation, coercive manipulation, censorship, or other misconduct that alters the content, veracity, or meaning of research findings or that may affect the planning, conduct, reporting, or application of science. This applies to all professional, research, and learning environments.
- Should focus professional comments to their areas of scholarly expertise when engaged in public discussions about the application and importance of research findings and will clearly distinguish professional comments from their opinions based on personal views.

4. Research Misconduct as defined by the U.S. Office of Research Integrity:

ASN adheres to the U.S. government definition of research misconduct, as defined by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI):

Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.

(a) Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.

(b) Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.

(c) Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.

(d) Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

5. Other Potential Areas of Research Misconduct

- Covering up or concealing research misconduct.
- Reprisals against those who report research misconduct (i.e., whistleblowers*).
- Malicious and/or false allegations of research misconduct, and violations of due process protections in handling allegations of research misconduct.
- Unethical and/or biased treatment of people, in a professional setting and while participating in scientific programs.
- Misrepresenting oneself as an official of ASN or as having authority beyond which one actually possesses.
- Misuse of ASN's name, funds, activities, or resources for non-approved purposes.
- Unauthorized solicitation of funds or resources under the auspices of ASN.
- Using ASN funds and resources without proper authorization and attribution or in a manner not commensurate with ASN policies.

*ASN adheres to the guidelines of the [United States Whistleblower Protection Program](#).

6. General Process for Filing and Investigating Allegations of Misconduct:

- Allegations of research misconduct may be submitted to ASN when the alleged action is directly connected to a research program operated under the direction of conducted by ASN.
 - When an allegation received by ASN also involves U.S. federally funded research and meets [the federal definition of research misconduct](#), ASN will follow the reporting requirements of the Policy on Federal Research Misconduct.
 - When an allegation of misconduct involves activity that is against the U.S. code of law, or the code of law in other respective regions, ASN will work with all appropriate authorities and home institutions as needed and required to resolve the allegation. Such authorities include but are not limited to (1) research, business, governmental, and academic institutions; (2) U.S. civil and criminal courts, or (3). police and other enforcement bodies.

- ASN recognizes that an allegation of research misconduct is not, in and of itself, proof of research misconduct. Any allegation bears the potential to damage professional credibility and cast doubt on the entire career of an accused party.
- Whenever possible, ASN will observe strict confidentiality when an allegation of research misconduct by a member is reported, up until the investigation process has been completed and a ruling by the governing body has been made, at which point confidentiality may or may not be preserved, depending on the case and the findings.

7. Involved Parties

- ASN's legal counsel oversees investigations of research misconduct and may convene an investigative task force consisting of ASN leaders and/or other experts, as well as ASN staff (other than the ASN EVP), to investigate any allegations the legal counsel deems to be substantial and thereby require investigation.
- ASN's legal counsel must examine all disclosures by volunteers and staff before appointing them to the task force. If there is any question of potential conflict of interest, legal counsel should ask another volunteer or staff member serve instead.
- The task force will investigate the allegations and make a recommendation to the ASN EVP and ASN Council. (Any member of ASN Council who served on the task force must recuse from Council deliberations.)
- The ASN Council has the final authority to determine what actions will be taken if an allegation of scientific misconduct is found to be substantiated.
- The complainant need not be an ASN member.

8. Responsibilities

- The ASN Vice President of Operations serves as the point of contact for receiving allegations of research misconduct. That person works with the ASN legal counsel to conduct an initial evaluation of the allegation to determine if a full investigation is required.
- The ASN Council will review the findings and recommendations and make a final determination of what actions are to be taken. (Any ASN Council member who has a conflict of interest will recuse.)
- If the allegation of research misconduct is substantiated, the ASN Council will determine the society's response to it and whether and under what circumstances other organizations need to be informed of the infraction.

9. Procedure

Reporting an Allegation

- Formal allegations regarding research misconduct by ASN members, staff, or others in connection with ASN research activities must be submitted to the ASN Vice President of Operations. Formally submitted allegations receive an initial review by the senior ASN staff member responsible for ethics and ASN's legal counsel. Other parties may be informed to allow for further assessment of evidence presented, including a determination of scope and next steps. Allegations that cannot be resolved immediately will be overseen by ASN's legal counsel who will convene an investigative task force consisting of ASN leaders (such as members of the ASN Council or the ASN Ethics and Professional Standards Committee) and/or other experts, as well as the ASN staff (other than the ASN EVP), to investigate any allegations the legal counsel deems to be substantial and thereby require investigation.
- All parties will be bound to treat all documents and information with the highest degree of confidentiality throughout and after the process. Failure to do so is deemed a serious breach of these guidelines.
 - The allegation must contain the following information:
 - The name and affiliation of the person(s) submitting the allegation and the name and identifying information of the person(s) alleged to have committed the scientific misconduct.
 - A description of the allegation that includes the date and circumstances of the alleged misconduct.
 - Any documents or other relevant items (such as data, scientific papers, memos, diaries, etc.) with annotation showing specifically how the item relates to the allegation.
 - An explanation of how the allegation relates to research misconduct as defined in this Policy. 5.
 - A statement explaining any conflict(s) of interest the person making the allegation has with the subject(s), entity(ies), or situation(s) named in the allegation. A conflict of interest does not preclude the filing of an allegation.
- Allegations may be returned if they do not contain the above information. It is advisable for anyone experiencing unacceptable behavior to keep detailed records of such incidents,

Investigating an Allegation

- ASN's legal counsel oversees investigations of research misconduct and may convene an investigative task force consisting of ASN leaders (such as members of the ASN Council or the ASN Ethics and Professional Standards Committee) and/or other experts, as well as ASN staff (other than the ASN EVP), to investigate any allegations the legal counsel deems to be substantial and thereby require investigation.

- This task force may conclude that the allegation: does not constitute research misconduct as defined by ASN, and so notify the ASN Council; or appears to constitute research misconduct as defined by ASN, and so notify the ASN Council.
- If the task force recommends, and the ASN Council agrees, that the allegation does not constitute research misconduct as defined by ASN, then the person making the allegation will be notified immediately by ASN's legal counsel and the complaint will be dismissed.
- If the task force recommends, and the ASN Council agrees, that the allegation may constitute research misconduct, then ASN's legal counsel will notify the person reporting the misconduct that ASN will begin an investigation.
- If the respondent admits to the alleged research misconduct at any time during the procedure, the investigation will be halted and the ASN legal counsel and senior staff member will prepare recommendations to ASN Council for actions and or sanctions to be taken.
- If the allegation involves U.S. federally funded research, meets the federal definition of research misconduct, and the task force determines there is sufficient evidence to proceed to an investigation, the home institution will need to be notified, and a determination made by ASN, whether the investigation will be carried out by the home institution, by ASN, or jointly.
- In some cases, an allegation may be resolved informally, such as through an apology and assurance that the action will not happen again (especially in cases of the respondent unknowingly causing offense). It will be the responsibility of ASN's legal counsel to determine the requires documentation for such a resolution.
- ASN's legal counsel and the task force should try to complete their investigation within three months from the time the task force is convened. Depending on the nature of any investigation, this time period may be extended.
 - All procedures will be confidential, to the extent allowed by law.
 - ASN's legal counsel will formally notify the person making the allegation and the respondent in writing that an allegation has been received and will be investigated and will provide an approximate timetable and description of the investigation.
 - Collection of information, evaluation of the allegation, and interaction with the person making the allegation and the respondent will be conducted under the guidance of ASN legal counsel and with the assistance of the senior ASN staff member responsible.
 - The person making the allegation and the respondent may provide written statements from themselves or others as part of the proceedings, under schedule limitations as provided by ASN.
 - The finding and recommendation of the task force will be outlined in a report prepared by ASN's legal counsel and approved by the members of the task force.

- The ASN Council may accept or reject recommendations of actions to be taken, or request more information from the task force, but may not reject the conclusions of the task force.

10. Sanctions

- If a finding of scientific misconduct has been made, the ASN Council will determine the actions to be taken, in accordance with ASN policies and practice.

11. Appeals

- If the ASN Council has recommended sanctions, the respondent has 60 days to file an appeal of the sanction and/or the finding. An appeal must be based on new evidence or reconsideration of evidence and include a narrative justification for the appeal.

12. Interactions with Other Institutions

All involved with an investigation of misconduct related to ASN research must recognize:

- Other institutions may need to be notified or involved in resolving the allegation. When an allegation involves U.S. federally funded research, meets the federal definition of research misconduct provided in this Policy, and ASN determines there is sufficient evidence to proceed to an investigation by the task force, then the home institution must be notified and a determination made whether the investigation will be carried out by the home institution, by ASN, or jointly.
- If the same allegation is already being investigated by a respondent's home institution, ASN may wait until that investigation is complete and the issue has been resolved before undertaking its own action, if any action is deemed necessary; or ASN may collaborate with the other institution in the investigation.
- Public notification of a finding of research misconduct should be considered only in the most serious of violations or when required by law.