

Standards of Professionalism

Professional Relationships

Adopted April 18, 2005; Amended June 7, 2023

AAOS Standards of Professionalism (SOPs) establish the minimum standards of acceptable conduct for orthopaedic surgeons. Violations of any SOP may result in professional compliance actions against an AAOS Fellow or Member found in violation. Not prepared using a systematic review, SOPs are developed through a consensus process and are ultimately adopted as official AAOS statements by the two-thirds vote of the AAOS Fellowship casting ballots.

As healers and professionals with specialized knowledge, orthopaedic surgeons hold a unique position of trust with patients, fellow physicians and health care providers. The professional relationships established between orthopaedic surgeons, fellow physicians and health care professionals are powerful tools that aid in caring for patients. To this end, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons (“AAOS”) have adopted these Standards of Professionalism.

The medical profession requires physicians to subordinate their own interests in favor of the patient’s best interests and hold themselves to high ethical and moral standards. Patients who entrust their medical care to orthopaedic surgeons have an expectation that they will be treated with compassion, empathy, honesty and integrity. It is incumbent on orthopaedic surgeons to develop professional relationships with colleagues and other health care professionals that satisfy the patient’s expectations.

These Standards of Professionalism draw from the aspirational Code of Medical Ethics and Professionalism that appears in bold italics. The statements that follow the aspirational Code establish the minimum standard of acceptable conduct for orthopaedic surgeons in their professional relationships. Violations of these minimum standards may serve as grounds for a formal complaint to and action by the AAOS as outlined in the AAOS Bylaws Article V.

These Standards of Professionalism apply to all AAOS Fellows and Members in their interactions as healers and as professionals valued for their knowledge and expertise. Only an AAOS Fellow or Member may file complaints of an alleged violation of these Standards of Professionalism regarding another AAOS Fellow or Member.

Aspirational: AAOS Code of Medical Ethics and Professionalism for Orthopaedic Surgeons, I.

A.:

The orthopaedic profession exists for the primary purpose of caring for the patient. The physician-patient relationship is the central focus of all ethical concerns.

Mandatory Standard:

1. An orthopaedic surgeon shall, while caring for and treating a patient, regard his or her responsibility to the patient as paramount.

Aspirational: AAOS Code of Medical Ethics and Professionalism for Orthopaedic Surgeons, V.

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Good relationships among physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals are essential for good patient care. The orthopaedic surgeon should promote the development and utilization of an expert health care team that will work together harmoniously to provide optimal patient care.

Mandatory Standards:

2. An orthopaedic surgeon shall maintain fairness, respect, and appropriate confidentiality in relationships with colleagues and other health care professionals. An orthopaedic surgeon shall communicate in a manner that enhances the profession.
3. An orthopaedic surgeon shall conduct himself or herself in a professional manner in interactions with colleagues or other health care professionals. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding behavior that is harassing, bullying or discriminatory.
4. An orthopaedic surgeon shall work collaboratively with colleagues and other health care providers to reduce medical errors, increase patient safety, and optimize the outcomes of patient care.
5. An orthopaedic surgeon who transfers care of a patient to another physician or other health care provider shall facilitate the transfer of care for the welfare of the patient and cooperate with those receiving the patient.