ACHA Guidelines

General Statement of Ethical Principles and Guidelines

As the principal advocate and leadership organization for college and university health, the American College Health Association (ACHA) is dedicated to advancing the health of college students. ACHA serves, supports, and represents a diverse group of professionals and students who provide health promotion, mental health, and clinical services at institutions of higher education. ACHA also serves, supports, and represents the members of the campus community who seek their services. Advocating ethical conduct of its individual and institutional members, ACHA is committed to enhancing the health and affirming the value, worth, and dignity of each individual in accordance with the core values expressed by ACHA:

- *Social justice, human dignity, and respect for all*
- *Provision of student-centered services*
- *Professional excellence, responsiveness, and ethical practice*
- *Multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to health*
- *Commitment and participation of those who advance health*
- *Active involvement of students*

All members of ACHA are expected to adhere to the general principles and standards of ethical conduct set forth in this General Statement.

Ethical Principles

Although a General Statement cannot offer standards that anticipate all possible situations with ethical implications, or provide precise formulae for resolving all ethical questions or conflicts, certain ethical principles assist ACHA members in making appropriate decisions when confronted with ethical dilemmas. This document is not only a resource when responding to problems and conflicts in daily practice, but also a framework for dialogue about moral issues among all those involved in advancing the health of college students and their community.

- **Provide beneficial and caring services.** Commitment to humane, kind, and compassionate treatment of people is essential to meet their physical, psychological, cognitive, and interpersonal needs. Further, as college health professionals, it is our obligation to focus on providing care designed to benefit the health and well-being of individuals. Caring treatment creates affirming relationships, reduces anxiety and avoidance, and encourages health-seeking behavior.
- **Do no harm.** Engaging in activities that cause or result in physical, psychological, or social harm to any individual is unacceptable and contrary to all standards of practice in the helping professions. Risk of harm must be managed and weighed against the potential benefit to the individual. Monitor and take steps to assure that association and institutional policies, programs, and practices do not threaten any individual's health and well being, self-worth, dignity, or safety, or are unjust or illegal.
- **Ensure respect and autonomy.** Autonomy addresses individual freedom and the right to choose what will happen to one's own person. Individuals should always be duly informed and permitted to make decisions regarding their education, treatment, and care. The individual has an inherent knowledge of personal needs and is most profoundly affected by any decision made. Supporting autonomy mitigates against undue influence to choose a particular course of action.

- **Protect privacy.** Privacy refers to the ability of the individual to maintain control over the time, place, manner, and extent to which information about one's self, beliefs, or person, is shared. Safeguarding privacy, respecting confidentiality, and protecting against disclosure of information except when required by law or authorized by the individual are essential to foster the establishment of a trusting relationship, preservation of the dignity and autonomy of the individual, and an increase in the likelihood that those who need services will seek them.
- **Promote justice.** The ethical principles of impartiality, fairness, equity, and reciprocity are basic elements in promoting justice. Justice also demands the appreciation and affirmation of the value of human differences, and vigorous opposition to all intolerance and discrimination concerning those differences, including, but not limited to: age; gender identity, including transgender; marital status; physical size; psychological/physical/learning disability; race/ethnicity; religious, spiritual, or cultural identity; sex; sexual orientation; socioeconomic status; or veteran status. Concern for maintaining human dignity and working toward social justice supports the development of health disciplines responsive to the needs of all.

Ethical Guidelines

ACHA expects that all ACHA members adhere to these ethical guidelines and seek to contract with individuals and organizations that behave in accordance with them.

1. **Responsibility in the Provision of Services.** Commit oneself to excellence in college health programs. Provide services in a compassionate, equitable, and unbiased manner to all individuals.
   a. Obtain informed consent before performing a procedure, embarking on a treatment course, enrolling individuals in a research study, and, when appropriate, presenting an educational program. Supply individuals with the relevant information needed to ensure they have the ability to make a decision which is truly their own.
   b. Routinely inform individuals of their rights and responsibilities, e.g., risks associated with electronic communications. Share confidential information only in accordance with professional ethical standards and requirements of law. Limit access to information, data, and records, including electronic records, only to authorized personnel. Appropriate levels of security must be established, with levels of access defined and restricted to identified users. College health professionals should be aware of exceptions for disclosure permitted by law, e.g., when an individual is threatening harm to self or others. Individuals have the right to request and receive a copy of their medical records, subject to any administrative costs.
   c. Obtain appropriate informed consent from those receiving services. Obtain parental permission for the evaluation and treatment of minors with the consent of the minor whenever legally and/or ethically appropriate.
   d. Identify one's own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with ethical implications. Treat others with dignity and respect even in the face of a values conflict and avoid the imposition of personal values. Recognize how one's personal values may conflict or concur with others' and impact one's professional decisions and actions. Identify situations where a values conflict may interfere with one's ability to render services in an objective and compassionate manner. Consultation and referral should be considered under these circumstances to avoid abandonment.
   e. In one's personal and professional relationships, affirm human differences and combat bigotry, intolerance, and oppression.
2. **Professional Responsibility and Competence.** Maintain appropriate level of knowledge, skills, and judgment to provide competent health-related services based on the established needs of the population. Accept ultimate responsibility for the consequences of one's action or inaction.
   a. Promote acquisition of new knowledge, improve skills, and seek opportunities for professional development. Encourage

colleagues and co-workers to enhance their own training and skills and assist them in identifying opportunities to do so.

b. Monitor personal and professional activities and effectiveness. Accept feedback from colleagues, co-workers, and individual members of the community. Seek appropriate assistance from professionals when warranted.

c. Accurately represent one's professional credentials, abilities, and limitations and correct any intentional or accidental misrepresentation of these qualifications by others or oneself.

d. Conduct one's professional work according to sound theoretical principles based on scientific research, and in accordance with the basic tenets of the profession.

e. Contribute to the development of one's own professional discipline and to the field of college health.

f. Obtain appropriate institutional approval (i.e., institutional review board) for any research studies involving human subjects including securing the applicable informed consent of all research subjects. Conduct, report, and represent research studies accurately. Submit research to peer review, and communicate results judged to be valid and of value to other professionals even if they reflect unfavorably on specific institutions, programs, services, or practices. Share original research data with qualified others upon reasonable request.

g. Acknowledge contributions by others to programs, reports, papers, articles, and presentations. Respect the rights of others, including students, to their intellectual property. Cite previous works on a topic when writing or speaking. Acknowledge major contributions to research projects or professional writing through joint authorship, and minor or technical contributions through notes or introductory statements.

h. Disclose all conflicts of interest including sources of funding, ownership of referring or referral facilities, and other affiliations, incentives, or remuneration that could bias or otherwise influence decision-making.

3. **Responsible and Ethical Relationships.** Treat all members of the community as individuals who possess intrinsic worth, dignity, and the right to privacy and autonomy. Work to prevent harm to others in one's relationships.

   a. Identify and work to eliminate discriminatory policies, attitudes, and practices.

   b. Take appropriate steps to explore and address with all members of the community the ethical implications of attitudes, communications and behaviors, and the effect of these on others.

   c. Seek to resolve conflicts in a manner consistent with the ethical principles in this document. In communicating with others, engage in respectful and constructive dialogue with a willingness to hear as well as to be heard.

   d. Abstain from exploitation, deception, threats, and coercion, including sexual harassment.

   e. Abstain from sexual intimacies with all for whom one has instructional, supervisory, or evaluative responsibility, and co-workers for whom one has supervisory or evaluative responsibility.

   f. Refrain from using one's position to seek unjustified personal gains, unfair advantages, or unearned goods and services. Refuse gifts from consumers or vendors which influence or may appear to influence the manner in which professional responsibilities may be exercised or services provided.

   g. Avoid dual and conflicting personal or professional relationships that may involve, or appear to involve, incompatible roles or opposing responsibilities.

   h. Refrain from abusing one's authority, job, or position either to hinder or to assist others in seeking financial gain or career advancement.

   i. Honor personal and professional commitments.

   j. When making referrals, ensure continuity of care and individual safety.

4. **Responsibility to One's Institution.** Work to promote the mission of one's institution by enhancing the health and wellness of the campus community and participating in the educational process.
   a. Fulfill one's professional and institutional responsibilities to the best of one's capacity.
   b. Work for constructive change and health promotion on behalf of all members of the campus.
   c. Report to appropriate authorities any condition, policy, activity, or practice that may impair the health of the campus community but, at the same time, preserve confidentiality of information in accordance with professional, ethical, and legal standards.
   d. Identify one's personal views and actions as a private citizen and distinguish them from those expressed or undertaken as an official representative of the institution.
   e. Encourage student empowerment and seek student opinion, e.g., surveys, comment cards, student health advisory committees, and other campus committees which include student membership.
   f. Encourage one's institution to develop formal plans to respond to student opinions, concerns, criticisms, and complaints.
   g. Recognize one's fiduciary responsibility to the institution. Assure that funds for which one has oversight are expended following established procedures and in ways that optimize value, are accounted for properly, and contribute to the accomplishment of the institution's mission and purposes. Assure that physical resources and personnel for whom one has oversight responsibility are dedicated to promote the welfare of individuals and uphold the reputation of the institution.
   h. Recognize that occasional conflicts arise between one's responsibilities as an employee of an institution, one's obligations to individual members of the community, colleagues, co-workers, or one's fidelity to the standards of one's profession. As needed, discuss the relevant issues or concerns in a respectful and open manner, with intent to resolve the conflict fairly and explicitly. When appropriate, seek advice and counsel in dealing with such conflicts.
5. **Responsibility to the American College Health Association (ACHA) and to the Field of College Health.** Work to promote the highest ethical standards in the field. Share responsibility with others in ACHA to fulfill the mission of this organization.
   a. Contribute to the work of ACHA by supporting its mission, vision, core values, goals, and policies.
   b. Identify one's personal views and actions as a private citizen, and distinguish them from those expressed or undertaken as an official representative of ACHA.
   c. Collaborate and share professional expertise with others in the academic community and the field of college health.
   d. Recognize one's fiduciary responsibility to ACHA. Assure that funds for which one has oversight are expended following established procedures and in ways that optimize value, are accounted for properly, and contribute to accomplishing the organization's mission and purposes. Assure that physical resources and personnel for whom one has oversight responsibility are dedicated to promote the welfare of members and constituents and uphold the reputation of the organization.
   e. Strive to avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts by prioritizing clinical, educational, scientific, ethical, and legal obligations over or above one's personal, political, economic, or professional interests and advantages. Resist personal, social, financial, political, and organizational pressures to use one's influence inappropriately; make professional judgments without consideration of one's personal gain.

Summary Statement

ACHA recognizes that these guidelines are a work in progress and will change as law and professional standards in the field of college health evolve. At this time, ACHA expects that all members actively uphold the principles and guidelines detailed in this document, as guides for conduct in professional activities and situations when breaches in these practices are evident.

Acknowledgements

The members of the American College Health Association Ethics Committee express their sincere gratitude and acknowledge contributions from various professional organizations in the drafting of the original General Statement in 1990, the 1996 and 2002 revisions, and this current document. The structure of this statement and some sections of text are derived or adapted from similar documents adopted for use by the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), ACPA: College Student Educators International, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. In addition, the work of the Institute for Global Ethics informed our understanding and appreciation of the essential role of shared values as a basis for ethical decision making. The outstanding work done by our colleagues in these associations has expedited our efforts and contributed to the overall quality and coherence of this document.

Revised by the ACHA Ethics Committee 5/10

ACHA American College Health Association
advocacy•education•research

1362 Mellon Road, Suite 180 | Hanover, MD 21076
(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org