

2024



College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA)

Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Guidelines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
INTRODUCTION	2
CODE OF CONDUCT	4
Professional Integrity	4
Academic Integrity:	4
Patient Care	4
Respectful Behavior:	4
Confidentiality	4
Professional Competence	5
Conflicts of Interest	5
Use of Social Media and Public Statements	5
ETHICAL STANDARDS	5
Honesty and Transparency	5
Respect for Patient Autonomy	5
Non-Discrimination	5
Accountability	5
CODE OF CONDUCT (TRAINERS)	6
Leadership and Mentorship:	6
Fairness and Objectivity:	6
Respect for Trainees:.....	6
Continuous Improvement:.....	6
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COLLEGE LEADERSHIP	6
Governance and Accountability:	6
Leadership and Representation:	6
Conflict Resolution:	6
Compliance and Legal Obligations:.....	6
DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES	7
Overview	7
Types of Misconducts	7
Procedures for Addressing Misconduct	9
Disciplinary Committee	11
Appeal Process.....	12
Implementation and Review.....	12
Conclusion	12
Appendix I Proposed Disciplinary Committee	13

FOREWORD.

The College of Surgeons of East, Central, and Southern Africa (COSECSA) is dedicated to enhancing the standards of surgical education, training, and practice throughout the region. Our mission is to equip surgeons with the necessary skills, knowledge, and ethical grounding to provide high-quality surgical care, thereby improving health outcomes for the populations we serve.

The integrity of our profession and the trust placed in us by the public are of utmost importance. To uphold these values, it is essential that all members of COSECSA, including trainees and trainers, adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards. This manual aims to provide a comprehensive and clear guide to the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures that govern our professional activities. It outlines the expectations for ethical behavior, the processes for addressing misconduct, and the roles and responsibilities of the Disciplinary Committee.

By adhering to these guidelines, we ensure consistency, fairness, and excellence in our programs. It is through this commitment that we can continue to foster a culture of integrity, respect, and accountability within the surgical community. We trust that all members will take these principles to heart and contribute to maintaining the high standards of COSECSA.

Thank you for your dedication to surgical excellence and for upholding the values that define our profession. Together, we can continue to make significant strides in improving surgical care across East, Central, and Southern Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA) is a non-profit, professional body whose mission is to promote excellence in surgical training, care and research.

COSECSA was established in 1999 and has 14 member countries – Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

The COSECSA Secretariat is headquartered in Arusha, Tanzania. COSECSA is a constituent college of the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC). COSECSA provides post-graduate surgical training through a faculty of Programme Directors, Assistant Programme Directors and Trainers in 127 accredited hospitals across sub-Saharan Africa.

Vision

To be a leading surgical body in terms of training, standards and research, in our region and beyond.

Mission

To promote excellence in surgical care, training and research to increase the accessibility of surgical services, especially to African rural populations by standardizing and widening access to surgical training, skills and knowledge

COSECSA objectives:

- To promote the honor and dignity of the surgical and allied health professions and to ensure that the highest ethical standards in the practice of surgery are maintained throughout the region.
- To organize a common training programme in recognized institutions and to organize examinations of candidates for admission to the College in the various disciplines of surgery.
- To promote and encourage postgraduate education and research in surgery which is relevant to the region.
- To organize workshops, seminars, lectures, and conferences which regularly bring together Members and Fellows of the College to advance the science and practice of surgery in the region.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this document is to establish a Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Committee Guidelines for members of the College of Surgeons of East, Central, and Southern Africa (COSECSA). The Code of Conduct is designed to promote a culture of respect, integrity, accountability and outlines the ethical principles and professional standards expected of all members, while the Disciplinary Committee Guidelines provide procedures for addressing allegations of misconduct. This code of conduct applies to Trainees, Trainers/Programme Directors and Leadership.

Applicability

This code applies to all COSECSA members, including trainees and trainers. It covers all professional activities and interactions, including patient care, research, teaching, and public statements.

Definitions

Trainees: Any individual who is training under COSECSA for a particular surgical programme

Trainers: Individuals responsible for training, supervising, and mentoring trainees

College Leadership: Members of the college's governing body, including administrators and other officials.

Misconduct: Behavior that violates the ethical or professional standards set forth in this code.

Disciplinary Committee: A group appointed by COSECSA to investigate and adjudicate cases of alleged misconduct.

Programme Director: is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the training programs within their institutions. This includes ensuring the quality of surgical education, compliance with COSECSA standards, and providing guidance and support to trainees and faculty members

Member: Any individual who is a part of COSECSA, including trainees, trainers, country representatives and other COSECSA staff.

General Principles

All members of the College are expected to:

- **Respect** the dignity, rights, and privacy of patients, colleagues, and staff.
- **Uphold** the highest standards of medical ethics, including honesty, integrity, and professionalism.
- **Comply** with all applicable national and international laws, regulations, and professional guidelines.
- **Promote** a safe and inclusive learning and working environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- **Foster** a culture of continuous learning, improvement, and collaboration

CODE OF CONDUCT

TRAINEES

Professional Integrity

Trainees shall conduct themselves with honesty and integrity in all professional interactions. They must adhere to the dress code and conduct guidelines set by the College and training institutions. Must be punctual, prepared, and engaged in all training activities, including lectures, clinical rotations, and assessments. They must adhere to the highest standards of ethical behavior, avoiding any actions that could bring the profession into disrepute.

Academic Integrity:

Avoid cheating, and any form of academic dishonesty. Submit original work and properly attribute sources in all academic submissions. Report any academic misconduct observed among peers.

Patient Care

Trainees must prioritize patient welfare and provide care that meets the highest standards of quality and safety. They should respect the dignity and rights of patients, ensuring compassionate and culturally sensitive care.

Respectful Behavior:

Trainees shall treat patients, peers, trainers, staff, and colleagues with respect, fairness, courtesy, and cooperation, fostering a collaborative environment while refraining from discriminatory, offensive, or undermining language and behavior that could damage trust or morale. Any incidents of harassment, bullying, or discrimination should be reported.

Confidentiality

Trainees must maintain the confidentiality of patient information, sharing it only with those directly involved in the patient's care (programme directors and trainers) or as required by law. Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is prohibited.

Professional Competence

Trainees are expected to maintain and improve their professional skills through continuous learning and staying informed of the latest medical advancements. They should seek consultation or referral when necessary to provide the best possible care.

Conflict of Interest

Both trainees and Trainers must identify and disclose any conflicts of interest that may compromise their professional judgment. They should avoid situations where personal interests could influence professional decisions.

Use of Social Media and Public Statements

Trainees should use social media responsibly, ensuring that their communications do not violate patient confidentiality or the standards of the profession. Public statements should be accurate and reflect the values of COSECSA.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

Honesty and Transparency

Trainees must be truthful in all professional communications and interactions, including patient records and research. They should disclose any errors or adverse events honestly and promptly.

Respect for Patient Autonomy

Trainees should respect the rights of patients to make informed decisions about their care. They must provide patients with all the necessary information to make informed choices and respect their decisions, even if they differ from the other recommendations.

Non-Discrimination

Trainees shall provide care without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other personal characteristic.

Accountability

Trainees are accountable for their actions and decisions. They should take responsibility for their work and seek help or guidance when needed and admit correcting any mistakes when they occur. They should also be willing to participate in peer review and quality improvement initiatives. Should take responsibility for one's actions and decisions, both clinically and academically and participate in self-assessment and be open to constructive feedback

CODE OF CONDUCT (TRAINERS)

Leadership and Mentorship:

Trainers must serve as role models of professionalism and ethical behavior. Provide clear guidance, support, supervision and feedback to trainees as well as encourage a culture of inquiry, critical thinking, and evidence-based practice.

Fairness and Objectivity:

Trainers must assess trainees based on merit, performance, and adherence to professional standards. They should avoid conflicts of interest and favoritism in the evaluation and promotion of trainees, provide equal opportunities for learning and growth to all trainees.

Respect for Trainees:

Treat trainees with respect and dignity, recognizing their contributions and potential. Avoid any form of abuse, harassment, or exploitation of trainees. Respect the autonomy and individuality of each trainee.

Continuous Improvement:

Engage in ongoing professional development to enhance teaching and mentorship skills. Stay updated with current best practices in surgical education and training. Encourage and support trainees in pursuing continuous learning and professional growth.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

Governance and Accountability:

Uphold transparency, integrity, and accountability in all decision-making processes. Ensure the College's mission, vision, and values are reflected in its policies and practices. Regularly review and update the College's policies to align with current best practices and legal requirements.

Leadership and Representation:

Represent the College and its members in a manner that reflects professionalism and ethical standards. Foster an inclusive, supportive, and collaborative environment within the College. Lead by example in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the College.

Conflict Resolution:

Address conflicts, grievances, and disciplinary issues promptly, fairly, and confidentially. Ensure that all members have access to clear and fair processes for resolving disputes. Protect the rights of all parties involved in disciplinary procedures.

Compliance and Legal Obligations:

Ensure the College complies with all relevant legal, regulatory, and ethical standards. Promote adherence to these standards among all members of the College. Regularly review and assess the College's compliance with its legal and ethical obligations.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

Overview

The disciplinary procedures outlined in this document provide a fair and transparent process for addressing allegations of misconduct. The goal is to uphold the integrity of the profession and protect the public and patients.

Types of Misconducts

The following are few types of misconducts that might be committed by trainees in the hospital, covering various aspects of professional and ethical behavior.

1. **Professional Misconduct: This refers to any conduct that falls below the expected standards of care and professionalism.**
 - **Negligence:** Failing to provide an appropriate standard of care, resulting in harm or potential harm to a patient.
 - **Incompetence:** Demonstrating a lack of knowledge, skill, or ability necessary for safe and effective medical practice. This encompasses performing procedures beyond one's prescribed expertise and failing to stay updated on advances in one's field of practice.
 - **Improper Documentation:** Failing to maintain accurate and complete medical records, falsifying patient records, or altering records improperly.
 - **Abandonment:** Inappropriately discontinuing patient care without proper transfer or referral.
 - **Failure to Follow Protocols:** Ignoring established medical protocols, guidelines, or hospital policies.
 - **Examination irregularities:** Within the context of COSECSA as a training institution, any examination irregularities either emanating from trainers or trainees such as impersonation, collusion, falsification of data and candidates' performances, providing unauthorized assistance, exam leakage, favoritism and any other such irregularity as deemed eligible by the college.

2. **Ethical Misconduct: This refers to any action or omission that violates the established moral, professional or legal standards of care, compromising patient safety or exploiting any inherent power disparity.**
 - **Breach of Confidentiality:** Disclosing patient information without consent or proper authorization and obtaining access to unauthorized patient data.
 - **Dishonesty:** Providing false information, lying about patient care activities, or misleading colleagues and supervisors.
 - **Exploitation:** Taking advantage of patients, including financial exploitation or engaging in inappropriate relationships.
 - **Disrespectful Behavior:** Demonstrating disrespect towards patients, colleagues, or staff, including inappropriate language or unprofessional demeanor.
 - **Informed Consent Violation** Performing procedures or treatments without obtaining proper informed consent from the patient or their legal guardian. This also encompasses blatant disregard of patient wishes and coercing patients into specific treatment options.

3. **Interpersonal Misconduct: Any unprofessional or unethical behavior that adversely impacts interprofessional or patient-practitioner relationship**
 - **Bullying and Harassment:** Engaging in bullying, harassment, or intimidation of colleagues, staff, or patients and creation of a hostile working environment with lack of respect to colleagues
 - **Discrimination:** Discriminating against patients or colleagues based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics.
 - **Conflict of Interest:** Engaging in activities where personal interests (financial or otherwise) conflict with professional duties or patient care.

4. **Behavioral Misconduct: A subset of interpersonal misconduct that primarily draws focus on actions that veer away from professional, impairing the safe and efficient delivery of care.**
 - **Substance Abuse and Health Risk:** Using or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while on duty or engaging in substance abuse This also covers practicing when one's mental and/or physical health compromises on patient's safety.
 - **Unprofessional Conduct:** Engaging in behavior that is unbecoming of a medical professional, such as inappropriate social media activity, financial extortion or exploitation of patients, or public statements that reflect poorly on the profession.
 - **Violence or Threatening Behavior:** Engaging in physical violence, threats, or aggressive behavior towards patients, colleagues, or staff.
 - **Absenteeism:** Repeatedly being absent from duty without a valid reason, resulting in compromised patient care and disruption of team dynamics.
 - **Sexual Harassment:** Engaging in unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

5. **Legal Misconduct: Any action or failure of action that violates applicable laws and regulation of the governing state or respective medical and surgical council.**
 - **Criminal Activities:** Engaging in illegal activities, such as theft, fraud, assault, battery, homicide or manslaughter whether within or outside the hospital.
 - **Violation of Licensing Requirements:** Practicing without proper licensure, beyond licensed limits or failing to comply with regulatory requirements.
 - **Fraud:** Misrepresentation of service provision, billing patients for un-delivered services or outside of the prescribed billing limits for procedures or any other fraudulent activity

6. **Research Misconduct: Any activities that deviate from the scientific and ethical standards as-prescribed by the College's research policies and other internationally recognized committees, conventions and declarations on research and publication ethics.**
 - **Data Fabrication:** Making up data or results and recording or reporting them in research.
 - **Data Falsification:** Manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing data or results in a way that deviates from the truth or actual research findings.
 - **Plagiarism:** Using another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.

- **Unethical Research Practices:** Conducting research without proper ethical approval, failing to obtain informed consent from research subjects, or failing to report adverse events.
- **Author disputes and conflict of interest:** Failing to follow guidelines for authorship as prescribed by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and failing to disclose any existing conflicts of interest.

Procedures for Addressing Misconduct

Reporting Misconduct

Any member of the healthcare team, including programme directors, trainees and trainers who observes or experiences a breach of this code of conduct should report it to the appropriate authority within the College. Reports should be made in good faith and without fear of retaliation and is close as possible to the time of occurrence.

Reports should be submitted in writing to the appropriate authority, such as the hospital's disciplinary committee and to the COSECSA Disciplinary Committee.

Investigation

Upon receiving a report of misconduct, an initial assessment will be conducted to determine if there is sufficient evidence to warrant a formal investigation. All reports of misconduct will be investigated promptly and thoroughly by an appointed disciplinary committee who will liaise with the specific country representative and Program Director and the appointed hospital disciplinary.

If an investigation is initiated, the accused trainee will be informed of the allegations in writing and given an opportunity to respond. The investigation will include interviews with witnesses, review of relevant documents, and gathering of any other pertinent evidence. The investigation will be conducted impartially, with respect for the rights of all parties involved

Disciplinary Actions

Depending on the severity and nature of the misconduct, disciplinary actions may range from verbal warnings, written warnings, probation, revocation of privileges to suspension or expulsion from the training program or leadership positions (for trainers and leadership). The severity of the disciplinary action will depend on the nature and gravity of the offense.

Remedial actions, such as counseling, additional training or supervision, may also be required and must be documented. After a final decision is made, the trainee as well as the investigating team should append their signature to a summary document and a copy submitted to COSECSA education assistant and Country representative.

Appeal Process

Trainees have the right to appeal disciplinary decisions if they believe there has been a procedural error or if new evidence has emerged.

Appeals must be submitted in writing and will be reviewed by an independent panel within the College.

By clearly outlining the types of misconduct and the procedures for addressing them, COSECSA

aims to maintain high professional standards and ensure a safe and ethical environment for both patients and healthcare professionals.

Rights of the Accused

The accused member has the right to be informed of the allegations, present evidence, and have representation during the disciplinary process. They should be treated with respect and fairness throughout the investigation.

Possible Outcomes and Sanctions

The Disciplinary Committee may recommend various outcomes, including no action, a warning, suspension, or expulsion from COSECSA. The decision will be based on the severity of the misconduct and any mitigating factors. After a final decision is made, the trainee as well as the investigating team should append their signature to a summary document and a copy submitted to COSECSA education assistant and Country representative.

Disciplinary Committee

Composition and Appointment

The Disciplinary Committee shall consist of a chairperson and a minimum of four other members appointed by COSECSA. Members should have diverse backgrounds and expertise to ensure a balanced perspective led by the Education Scientific and Research Committee (ESRC)

Roles and Responsibilities

The committee is responsible for investigating reports of misconduct, making recommendations, and ensuring the disciplinary process is fair and transparent. They must maintain confidentiality and impartiality throughout the proceedings.

Decision-Making Process

Decisions will be made by a majority vote of the committee members. The committee's findings and recommendations will be documented and communicated to the relevant parties.

Confidentiality and Record-Keeping

All proceedings and records of the disciplinary process will be kept confidential, except as required by law or as necessary to protect the public. Records will be securely stored and accessible only to authorized individuals.

Appeal Process

Grounds for Appeal

Trainees may appeal a disciplinary decision if they believe there was a procedural error, new evidence has emerged, or the decision was unjust. Appeals must be submitted in writing within a specified time frame.

Appeal Procedure

The appeal will be reviewed by an independent panel appointed by COSECSA. The panel will consider the grounds for appeal and make a final decision based on the evidence presented.

Final Decision

The decision of the appeal panel is final and binding. There will be no further recourse within COSECSA.

Implementation and Review

Dissemination of the Code

The Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Committee Guidelines will be distributed to all trainees and made available on the COSECSA website. Trainees are expected to familiarize themselves with the code and adhere to its principles.

Training and Education

COSECSA will provide training and educational resources to help trainees understand and comply with the code. This includes workshops, seminars, and online materials.

Review and Amendments

The code will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. Amendments may be made as necessary, with input from members and stakeholders.

Conclusion

This Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Committee Guidelines reflect COSECSA's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of professionalism and ethical behavior. Members are encouraged to uphold these standards in all aspects of their practice and contribute to a culture of excellence in the medical profession.

Appendix I Proposed Disciplinary Committee

Role	Post-holder	Email
Education Scientific and Research Committee (ESRC)	Dr Michael Mwachiro	deche2002@yahoo.com
Secretary General	Prof. Abebe Bekele	abebesurg@yahoo.com
Trainer	Programme Director
Registrar	Prof Eric Borgstein	eborg@me.com
Vice President	President Elect
	Country Representative

Note* The Respective Programme Directors are the Chairperson of the disciplinary committee under each training hospitals who will work hand in hand with the country representative of the respective country.