

# Code of conduct des Swiss College of Surgeons

## 1. Introduction

This code of conduct serves as a guideline and is addressed to all members of the professional societies under the umbrella of the Swiss College of Surgeons (SCS). It formulates shared values and expectations that guide professional conduct and thus creates a binding foundation for all involved. The aim of the code is to ensure a respectful, fair, and safe working environment.

The umbrella organization is expressly committed to equal treatment, diversity, and non-discriminatory collaboration, a working environment that protects physical and personal integrity, and takes a firm stance against abuse of power. This position is based on respect for human dignity, the principles of respect, integrity, and professionalism, and Swiss legislation<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to existing oaths such as the Hippocratic Oath, the Geneva Declaration of the World Medical Association, the new Swiss Medical Oath, and existing hospital codes of conduct, the SCS aims to emphasize the importance of a critical approach to power and strengthen structures to protect against boundary violations with its code of conduct. Members are encouraged to embody these values in their work.

## 2. Specific rules of conduct in everyday professional life

### 2.1.A culture of mindfulness and acceptance of mistakes

- 1) Recognizing that boundary violations, abuse of power, and discrimination typically begin in seemingly harmless situations, members are vigilant for signs of misconduct, conflict, or abuse and take early action.
- 2) A conscious and constructive approach to mistakes, prioritizing improvement and taking responsibility, as well as the ability to express and respond to criticism openly and respectfully, are integral to the professional conduct of all members.

### 2.2. Integrity and respect

*Integrity refers to an attitude of honesty, sincerity, and straightforwardness.*

- *Physical integrity refers to every person's right to bodily integrity and protection from violence, abuse, or unwanted interference.*
- *Personal integrity encompasses the right to the protection of one's personality, thoughts, and feelings. This includes respectful treatment, protection from humiliation, discrimination, or psychological pressure, and the preservation of individual dignity.*

1. Members act reliably, transparently, and in accordance with shared values – even when there is no direct oversight.
2. Members respect personal boundaries and contribute to a work environment that protects everyone's physical and mental well-being.
3. Respectful behaviour is mandatory in all situations.

---

<sup>1</sup> The following federal legal principles are of particular importance to members with regard to respectful and ethical conduct in the workplace: Federal Act on Labour in Industry, Trade and Commerce (Labour Act, ArG) of 13 March 1964 (as of 1 September 2023); Federal Act concerning the amendment of the Swiss Civil Code (Part Five: Code of Obligations) of 30 March 1911 (as of 1 October 2025); Federal Act on Equality between Women and Men (Equality Act, GlG) of 24 March 1995 (as of 1 July 2020); Swiss Criminal Code of 21 December 1937 (as of 1 August 2025).



### 2.3. Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

*Discrimination refers to the unjustified unequal treatment of individuals based on their actual or perceived membership in a particular group, such as national, ethnic or social origin, skin colour, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, worldviews, disabilities or similar factors.*

1. Members strive to ensure equal opportunities in the workplace. Through equal treatment, or, in cases of differing qualifications, through targeted support, every individual receives fair opportunities for professional development.
2. Members act without discrimination and refrain from actions or statements that disadvantage, exclude, demean, restrict, favour, or deny people equal access.
3. Members with decision-making authority serve as role models and advocate for non-discriminatory structures, organizations, and institutions.
4. Decisions regarding compensation, promotion, training, and other professional opportunities are made without discrimination. Discrimination based on gender, origin, age, sexual orientation, religion, language, disability, or other personal characteristics is prohibited.

### 2.4. Dealing with boundaries

1. Professional conduct requires a conscious approach to proximity and distance. Excessive or inappropriate proximity, as well as demeaning distance, can violate integrity. A thoughtful approach to boundaries protects all involved and safeguards dignity in the workplace.
2. Exerting pressure, promising advantages, or demanding favours based on proximity or hierarchical relationships is unacceptable.
3. Boundary violations are clearly identified; those affected are supported in defending themselves and accessing available support services.
4. The assessment of boundary violations is guided by the needs of the individuals affected. Even boundary violations in the grey area between appropriate and unacceptable behaviour are taken seriously, and transgressions are addressed respectfully.

### 2.5. Sexual harassment

*Sexual harassment in the workplace encompasses any unwanted act of a sexual nature that demeans a person or group based on their gender or sexual orientation. This includes unwanted physical contact, suggestive remarks, leering, displaying pornographic material, soliciting favours, as well as threats or coercion.*

1. Members are vigilant for signs of potential sexual harassment and respect everyone's personal boundaries.
2. Members support victims and take a clear stand against sexual harassment.
3. Members in leadership positions take reports seriously and handle them with due diligence in accordance with their duty of care under labour law.

### 2.6. Dealing with power and dependencies

*Power refers to the ability or possibility to influence or control other people. In a professional context, power is often linked to relationships of dependency. These describe situations in which one person is subordinate to another and therefore becomes particularly vulnerable. They arise especially from hierarchical structures (e.g., between superiors and employees or between training managers and students) as well as from evaluation and decision-making authority, such as in the context of performance reviews, contract renewals, compensation, letters of recommendation, or the allocation of resources.*



1. Leaders use their power responsibly, behave professionally, and follow rules that protect and promote their subordinates.
2. Power and dependencies must not be abused for personal gain, such as by promising advantages, threatening disadvantages, engaging in discriminatory behaviour, or acting in a way that violates integrity.

## 2.7. Violence and bullying

*Violence violates personal integrity and includes physical and psychological assaults, as well as verbal or structural actions that impair the well-being, safety, or dignity of individuals in the workplace. Violence can have racist, sexual, or other discriminatory aspects and is often related to abuse of power and can also occur through subtle actions.*

*Mobbing refers to the systematic exclusion and humiliation of a person over a prolonged period with the aim of isolating or marginalizing them. Unequal power dynamics are often a decisive factor. Examples include assigning meaningless tasks, devaluing achievements, or withholding important information.*

1. Violence and bullying will not be tolerated in any form.
2. Members in positions of management responsibility will take the necessary measures, in accordance with labour law, to protect the personal integrity of employees.

## 2.8. Conflicts of interest and compliance

*Conflicts of interest exist when personal interests, such as financial gain, private relationships, or secondary employment, impair professional freedom of decision-making or create the appearance of bias. Compliance refers to the obligation to adhere to all applicable laws, internal guidelines, and professional ethical standards.*

1. Compliance with laws, guidelines, and oaths is mandatory for all members.
2. Violations of these standards are considered misconduct and include abuse of power, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or persistent disrespectful behaviour.
3. Members are required to disclose any private relationships within an institution, particularly in hierarchical situations. This disclosure serves the purpose of transparency and protects the integrity of professional conduct.

### 3. Recommendations

#### 3.1. Prevention efforts

1. Individuals in leadership positions contribute to raising awareness of power, violence, and discrimination through training programs and information campaigns. They advocate for the legally mandated obligation to prevent sexual harassment within their institutions.
2. All members utilize existing training programs to address issues such as sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination in the workplace.

#### 3.2. Classification aid

Institutions, employers and employed medical specialists can use the following guideline for classification in cases of suspected boundary violations and abuse of power.

Minor border violation	moderate border violation	severe border violation
<p><b>Workplace dispute</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate behaviour or remarks</li> <li>• Arguments between equals</li> <li>• Often unintentional</li> <li>• Often a one-off occurrence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Irritation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate behaviour involving aspects of abuse of power and/or discrimination</li> <li>• Often vague, diffuse, unclear</li> <li>• Suspected intent</li> <li>• Repeat offenses</li> </ul>	<p><b>crisis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Situations requiring increased protection (violence, harassment, bullying, clear abuse of power)</li> <li>• Concrete suspicion</li> <li>• Cases requiring immediate action</li> <li>• Criminal offenses</li> <li>• Violations of the Equal Opportunities Act</li> <li>• Challenges that must be addressed</li> <li>• Situations where reputational damage is feared</li> </ul>
<p><i>Internally solvable, everyday challenges that offer opportunities for further development.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback culture</li> <li>• Discussions</li> <li>• Excuses</li> <li>• Signing of binding agreements, goals, and measures</li> <li>• Further training, seminars, and workshops</li> <li>• Role models</li> <li>• Documentation</li> </ul>	<p><i>To be resolved with the four-eyes principle and increased attention. If necessary, involve external parties/HR and/or the next higher management level.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured feedback and supervision</li> <li>• Coaching</li> <li>• Roundtables</li> <li>• Employment law/formal procedures</li> <li>• Definition of appropriate measures</li> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Information to</li> </ul>	<p><i>Standard involvement of HR and line management. External bodies and authorities may be consulted if necessary.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of those affected (forensic investigation, physical separation)</li> <li>• Employment law/formal procedures (warning, reprimand, transfer, dismissal, and other personnel-related consequences)</li> <li>• Definition of appropriate measures</li> </ul>

### **3.3. Reporting procedures and courses of action in institutions**

*Informal procedures include consultations and triage by internal trusted individuals without supervisory authority or by external counselling services. These procedures are confidential and do not lead to any employment-related consequences. Further steps or the disclosure of information to supervisors and company management only occurs with the consent of the individual concerned.*

*If a report is made to a supervisor or the HR department, a formal procedure is initiated due to the legally enshrined duty of care. In such cases, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as further individuals must be involved to clarify the situation (the accused, HR, supervisors, witnesses). This investigation is documented, and recommendations for resolving the conflict are formulated. Formal procedures may have consequences under labour law.*

1. Ideally, internal confidential advisors and clearly designated external contact points (see Appendix 2) are available for complaints (informal procedure).
2. Formal internal procedures are clearly defined and transparent.
3. All discussions are documented (see Appendix 3 for the protocol of formal procedures).
4. In situations that cannot be resolved internally, an external investigation is recommended.
5. Whistleblowers who report misconduct are protected.

### **3.4. Process in cases of boundary violations in institutions**

It is recommended that the procedure for dealing with boundary violations be documented in writing and presented in an idealized format. Appendix 1 provides examples of how to proceed and what needs to be documented.

## **4. Final Provisions**

1. The SCS is committed to this Code of Conduct and considers the principles formulated therein to be guiding principles for its members.
2. The scope also includes all activities within the professional societies.
3. The Code of Conduct is reviewed regularly and adapted to current challenges and needs as require
4. It is at the discretion of the local organizations to review compliance and implementation, as well as to take further action in the event of violations.

Effective May 1, 2026

On behalf of the SCS board



Prof. Dr. med. S. Holland-Cunz  
President SCS



Prof. Dr. med. et MME emerit. M.K. Widmer  
Secretary General SCS



The code of conduct was created in collaboration with begleitbüro bern.  
>> [kathrin.zehnder@begleitbuero.ch](mailto:kathrin.zehnder@begleitbuero.ch) | 079 902 27 27

Brunnmattstrasse 21 | 3007 Bern  
[www.begleitbuero](http://www.begleitbuero.ch)



## Annex 1

### Further information on the procedure in the case of Misconduct

Note: The links with examples from other institutions allow for a more in-depth exploration of the topic of misconduct. They focus on sexual harassment but can also be applied to other boundary violations.

#### General information

[https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/J8NhW18NbYX2/allgemeine\\_hinweiszumreglement.pdf](https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/J8NhW18NbYX2/allgemeine_hinweiszumreglement.pdf)

#### Procedural steps

<https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/ExMe2fW1CDes/verfahrensschritte.pdf>

#### Procedure from the perspective of an accused person

[https://www.pa.fin.be.ch/content/dam/pa\\_fin/dokumente/de/themen/bgm/gesundheitsschutz/konzept-gegen-sexuelle-bel%C3%A4stigung/Prozess%20beschuldigte%20Person\\_sexuelle%20Bel%C3%A4stigung.pdf](https://www.pa.fin.be.ch/content/dam/pa_fin/dokumente/de/themen/bgm/gesundheitsschutz/konzept-gegen-sexuelle-bel%C3%A4stigung/Prozess%20beschuldigte%20Person_sexuelle%20Bel%C3%A4stigung.pdf)

#### Approach from the perspective of an affected person

[https://www.pa.fin.be.ch/content/dam/pa\\_fin/dokumente/de/themen/bgm/gesundheitsschutz/konzept-gegen-sexuelle-bel%C3%A4stigung/Prozess%20betroffene%20Person\\_sexuelle%20Bel%C3%A4stigung.pdf](https://www.pa.fin.be.ch/content/dam/pa_fin/dokumente/de/themen/bgm/gesundheitsschutz/konzept-gegen-sexuelle-bel%C3%A4stigung/Prozess%20betroffene%20Person_sexuelle%20Bel%C3%A4stigung.pdf)

#### Conversation guide

<https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/TiqFF5o2u3Je/gespraechsleitfadenfueransprechpersonen.pdf>

#### Responsibilities

[https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/wjDKqqXTdDwj/funktionen\\_und\\_verantwortlichkeiten.pdf](https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/wjDKqqXTdDwj/funktionen_und_verantwortlichkeiten.pdf)

## Appendix 2

### Advice centers and support services

Regional counseling centers of Victim Support Switzerland

<https://www.opferhilfe-schweiz.ch/en/where-can-i-find-support/>

Counseling in cases of sexual harassment

<https://belaestigt.ch/i-need-advice/>

Anti-Bullying Support Center

<https://www.fachstelle-mobbing.ch/>

Cantonal conciliation authorities

<https://www.lex4you.ch/de/lex-search/arbeiten/arbeitsvertrag/documents/adressen-anlaufstellen#schlichtungsbehoerden>

Conciliation bodies under the Equal Opportunities Act

[https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/7bpL3n-aWXYu/Adressen\\_Schlichtungsstellen%20nach%20GlG.pdf](https://www.ebg.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/7bpL3n-aWXYu/Adressen_Schlichtungsstellen%20nach%20GlG.pdf)

## Appendix 3

### Example of a protocol from a conversation regarding complaints and boundary violations

*(for institutions, employers, HR)*

*Delete or fill in the yellow markings*

#### 1. Introduction to the conversation / Information

- The facilitators are committed to clarifying situations involving potential misconduct or boundary violations fairly, respectfully, and objectively. The goal is to ensure a safe environment for patients and staff.
- Discussions with accused or affected individuals in connection with a potential boundary violation are always conducted with utmost care and sensitivity. To guarantee fairness, transparency, and mutual protection, two internal personnel are always involved in the discussion.
- It is possible to bring along a professional or personal companion of the accused or affected individual. Was this communicated in advance?
- Protecting the personal integrity of all involved is of paramount importance. Accused individuals are protected just as much as those affected. Prejudgment is unacceptable.
- The discussions are confidential. Employers are bound by confidentiality. If the matter involves a potential criminal offense or an acute threat, it may be necessary to take steps that compromise confidentiality.
- All information must be treated confidentially. However, it may be necessary to involve other individuals, for example, for witness interviews or employment law assessments. Communication with the team, patients, relatives, or the public will be conducted exclusively through the responsible supervisors. Specialist agencies, experts, or authorities may be consulted as needed.
- This protocol serves as the basis for further action. It contains only the accounts of the interviewees, not the moderator's interpretations. At the end of the interview, the protocol will be read and signed by all attendees.
- Both the affected and the accused are prohibited from independently confronting the other party. Discussions will take place exclusively in the presence of supervisors and after prior consultation. This ensures that complaints and boundary violations are handled within a clearly structured, fair, and responsible framework.
- The person involved was informed about the initial situation and why they were invited to this meeting (see point 3, "Content of the report").

## 2. Protocol

Date: **xx.xx.xxxx**

- Interview with accused person  
 Interview with affected person

## 3. Information on persons involved

Function	Name
Affected person	
Person conducting the interview	
Internal second person (taking notes)	
Accused person	
Accompanying person (if applicable)	

## 4. Content of the message / description of the situation

What is the accused person accused of?

Date	Description
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	

## 5. Content of the report/situation/boundary violation (see possibly complaint form)

What was the accused person charged with and by what means?

Date	Description
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	
<b>xx.xx.xxxx</b>	

## 6. The viewpoint of the person concerned

### Guiding questions:

- How are you feeling? Do you feel able to talk about the situation? (If not: document the situation or – if appropriate – end the meeting and plan a new format, e.g., with a companion or external facilitator.)
- Is this discussion format suitable for you, and are you here voluntarily?
- What happened? Please describe the objective sequence of events.
- When did it happen?
- Who was involved? Were there any witnesses?
- Do you have any other evidence or documentation of the incident?
- How did you experience the situation?
- What made you feel insecure, hurt, or disturbed?
- Did you react to the situation? If so, how?
- What courses of action do you see?
- What expectations do you have of the accused person, the team, and management?
- Do you require further advice or support (referral to internal and external resources)?

*Text field - Word transcript*



## 7. Point of view of the accused person

### Guiding questions:

- How are you feeling? Do you feel able to talk about the situation?
- Is this discussion format suitable for you, and are you here voluntarily? (If not: Document the situation or – if justifiable – end the discussion and plan a new format, e.g., with a companion or external facilitator.)
- What happened from your perspective? Please describe the sequence of events.
- When did it happen?
- Who was involved? Were there any witnesses?
- The following statements from the person affected were reported to us... How does their account differ from yours?
- How did you experience the situation?
- Did you react? If so, how?
- What courses of action or recommendations do you see for dealing with the situation further?
- What expectations do you have of the team and management?

*Text field – Word transcript*

### 8. Further action

The parties involved determine the following next steps and measures:

Action	Responsible	Date

### The case is closed.

Yes

No

Date and signature of all parties involved

Name1

Name2

Name3

Name4