

Augusta University  
House Staff Policies and Procedures

Policy

HS 21.0 Appropriate Treatment of House Staff

Source

Graduate Medical Education Office

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1.0 Purpose

To establish guiding principles for the appropriate treatment of House Staff at Augusta University.

2.0 Procedure

Augusta University is a learning community comprised of students, interns, residents, fellows, faculty, other health care professionals, and staff whose goal is to enable each learner to achieve an education to their fullest potential, while providing quality patient care. A cornerstone of the educational community is the expectation that learners will be treated appropriately and with dignity. The guiding principle of professional behavior of Augusta University is the absolute requirement of “respect for other persons.” In our diverse learning community, respect is to be demonstrated toward all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability status, or religion. Such a learning environment includes honest and constructive corrective feedback. Such feedback should be provided in a helpful, specific, timely, and accurate manner, focused on behaviors, and, when negative, given privately and respectfully.

Those providing feedback should do so mindful of the goal of helping the learner to improve. Those receiving feedback should do so graciously, with the assumption that it is given generously and in good faith. When inappropriate treatment is perceived to have occurred, learners must be able to communicate their concerns free from the fear of retaliation or intimidation. Academic growth often occurs best when the learner is challenged within appropriate constraints. Disagreements are part of the academic environment of openness and can be conducted in a civil and respectful way. See the AAMC “Compact Between Resident Physicians and Their Teachers,” available online at: <https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/residentcompact/>.

3.0 Responsibilities of the Faculty

3.1 Demonstrate the professional virtues of fidelity, compassion, integrity, courage, temperance, and altruism

3.2 Maintain high professional standards in all interactions with patients, colleagues, learners, and staff

3.3 Ensure that all components of House Staff educational programs are of high quality

3.4 Nurture the House Staff’s intellectual and personal development and achievement of academic excellence

3.5 Respect House Staff as individuals, without regard to gender, race, national origin, religion, age, disability status, or sexual orientation

3.6 Support the House Staff’s well-being

3.7 Be intolerant of abuse or exploitation of the House Staff

3.8 Encourage House Staff who experience mistreatment or who witness unprofessional behavior to report the facts immediately to appropriate faculty or staff; treat all such reports as confidential as possible, and do not tolerate intimidation or retaliations of any kind

4.0 Responsibilities of the House Staff

4.1 Demonstrate the professional virtues of fidelity, compassion, integrity, courage, temperance, and altruism

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- 4.2 Embrace the highest standards of the medical profession and maintain high professional conduct in all interactions with patients, faculty, colleagues, and staff
- 4.3 Strive to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to fulfill all educational objectives established by the faculty and Program
- 4.4 Demonstrate accountability and responsibility in the educational program and in the care of patients

5.0 Definitions

Mistreatment is behavior that adversely affects the learning environment and negatively impacts the learner/faculty relationship. Inappropriate and unacceptable behaviors promote an atmosphere in which abuse is accepted and perpetuated in the learning environment. In general, actions taken in good faith by faculty to correct unacceptable performance is not considered mistreatment. Pointing out during rounds, conferences, operating rooms, or other setting that a learner is not adequately prepared for their assignments or required learning material is not mistreatment unless it is done in an inappropriate manner.

The following are some specific illustrations (but not an exhaustive list) of behaviors that would promote appropriate treatment of House Staff and behaviors that would be considered inappropriate:

- 5.1 Examples of appropriate behavior include:
  - 5.1.1 Conducting all interactions in a manner free of bias or prejudice of any kind
  - 5.1.2 Providing a clear description of expectations by all participants at the beginning of all educational endeavors, rotations, and assignments
  - 5.1.3 Encouraging an atmosphere of openness in which House Staff will feel welcome to offer questions, ask for help, make suggestions, and politely disagree
  - 5.1.4 Providing timely and specific feedback in a constructive manner, appropriate to the level of experience/training, and in an appropriate setting with the intent of guiding House Staff towards a higher level of knowledge and skill
  - 5.1.5 Focusing such feedback on observed behaviors and desired outcomes with suggestions for improvement
  - 5.1.6 Encouraging an awareness of faculty responsibilities toward all individual learners in a group setting
  - 5.1.7 Providing an educational experience of the highest quality, along with the time, preparation, and research necessary to achieve that goal
  - 5.1.8 Basing rewards and grades on merit, not favoritism
  - 5.1.9 Focusing constructive criticism on performance rather than personal characteristics of the House Staff
  - 5.1.10 Encouraging all staff at Augusta University affiliated hospitals and clinics and other associated participating sites to adhere to the expectation to treat House Staff with dignity and respect
  - 5.1.11 Seeking acknowledgement by learners of course/rotation expectations and the responsibility for fulfilling those requirements to the best of one's ability while encouraging them to ask for feedback from faculty, House Staff, colleagues, and staff as appropriate
  - 5.1.12 Acceptance of feedback in an objective manner and the incorporation of such feedback into future efforts so as to achieve the desired educational outcome

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- 5.1.13 Understanding that feedback is given with the intention of helping to further the learner's progress in meeting course and/or rotation expectations
- 5.1.14 Promptly and properly addressing, through appropriate administrative avenues, of any incidents and circumstances that fall outside the tenets set forth herein
- 5.1.15 Providing an honest and earnest effort to give constructive criticism - written, verbal, or otherwise - to peers and supervisors, when such feedback is likely to enhance their skill as a physician and/or educator

5.2 Examples of inappropriate treatment include:

- 5.2.1 Questioning or otherwise publicly addressing House Staff in a way that would generally be considered humiliating, dismissive, ridiculing, berating, embarrassing, or disrespectful by others
- 5.2.2 Asking House Staff to perform personal chores (e.g., buying lunch, running errands)
- 5.2.3 Telling inappropriate stories or jokes (e.g., ethnic, sexist, racist)
- 5.2.4 Behaving in an aggressive manner (e.g., yelling, throwing objects, cursing, and threatening physical harm) that creates a hostile learning environment
- 5.2.5 Denying educational opportunities with the sole intent of punishment
- 5.2.6 Making disparaging comments about House Staff, faculty, patients, or staff
- 5.2.7 Touching House Staff in an inappropriate manner
- 5.2.8 Taking credit for a House Staff's work without appropriate credit
- 5.2.9 Intentional neglect

Under no circumstances will Augusta University consider it acceptable for faculty to demonstrate bias, prejudice, exclusion, or other unprofessional behavior such as humiliation towards House Staff. Such unacceptable behavior includes the creation of a concern of "retaliation" by faculty for the filing of a complaint for unprofessional behavior.

Likewise, House Staff must appreciate that the provision of constructive feedback in a professional and objective manner by faculty is a desirable means of providing them with guidance in the learning process; such feedback is encouraged and in the best interests of our educational system for House Staff.

5.3 Exclusions from this policy

This policy is not intended to fully include complaints of sexual harassment or complaints of discrimination on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, religion, veteran status, age, marital or parental status, or national origin. Augusta University has specific campus policies to address these complaints. GME Office can be contacted for further guidance.

6.0 Procedure for Reporting and Dealing with Allegations of Mistreatment that Involves House Staff: Please see GME House Staff policies 39.0 and HS12.0.

7.0 Protection and Retaliation

Every effort will be made to protect alleged victims of mistreatment from retaliation if they seek redress. Retaliation will not be tolerated. To help prevent retaliation, those who are accused of mistreatment will be informed that retaliation is regarded as a form of mistreatment. Accusations that retaliation has occurred will be handled in the same manner as accusations concerning other forms of mistreatment.

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8.0 Malicious Accusations

A complaint or witness found to have been dishonest or malicious in making allegations of mistreatment may be subject to disciplinary action.

9.0 Education

Education is the cornerstone in the prevention of House Staff mistreatment. A thorough and on-going effort should be made to inform all involved individuals about the appropriate treatment of House Staff and of this policy dealing with alleged mistreatment. To that end, the following notification mechanisms will be utilized:

10.0 House Staff

This policy will be included in the Medical College of Georgia GME House Staff Handbook located on the GME website (<https://www.augusta.edu/mcg/residents/>) and a hard copy will be available in the GME office upon request. A discussion of mistreatment in general, as well as of this policy in particular, will take place each year at House Staff Orientation. Each Program Director will be encouraged to include this policy or a similar program-specific policy in their House Staff program's handbook.

11.0 Faculty

An informative written message will be sent each year from the GME office to all department chairs and program directors asking them to convey this information to all teaching faculty and to ensure that all teaching faculty are aware of the University's philosophy on the appropriate treatment of House Staff and of this policy.



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04/10/23  
Date



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