

UH Health* Code of Conduct

WHAT IS THE CODE OF CONDUCT AND WHO DOES IT APPLY TO?

This Code of Conduct is an essential part of the University of Houston System (UHS) Compliance Program and provides guiding principles for every member of UH Health's workforce, including faculty and staff, students, trainees, visiting observers, scholars, volunteers, vendors and contractors (Health Care Personnel). It does not replace any policy or procedure, but provides a framework for how we deliver care to our patients and provides guidance to help you determine the appropriate actions to take in various situations.

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PART OF UH HEALTH?

You are personally responsible to know, comply, and act in compliance with this UH Health Code of Conduct, applicable law, and the policies and procedures of UHS and the applicable System University. You are responsible to avoid involvement in illegal, unethical, and/or otherwise improper acts, to seek guidance when in doubt about your responsibilities, and to report any suspected or known violation.

WHAT IF I HAVE A QUESTION OR CONCERN?

The rules governing the health care industry can be complex. If you have any questions or concerns with any area of compliance, you are expected to ask for guidance. It is always better to ask for help before taking an action that might be improper. UH Health supports open discussion of ethical and legal questions. If you have questions or concerns regarding the appropriateness of a decision or action, you should take the following steps:

1. Communicate with an immediate supervisor or manager:

You should immediately discuss the issue with your supervisor, manager, or team leader. These individuals will be the most familiar with individual job requirements and business practices for the clinic.

2. Communicate with higher level management:

If you are not comfortable speaking with a direct supervisor or manager, then you should contact a higher level manager in the department or within the clinic or specialty within which you practice.

3. Contact the System-Wide Compliance Officer

The System-Wide Compliance Officer has been designated as the individual with lead responsibility for compliance issues.

* UH Health refers to Health Care Clinics throughout the University of Houston System. A Health Care Clinic is any facility, building, room, place, or establishment on or off campus managed and operated by UHS or its universities where physical and health examinations, health consultations, organized medical services, including offering diagnostic, therapeutic, or preventative outpatient services, and/or the care or treatment of people is provided or made available outside a hospital setting. A Health Care Clinic may involve students, faculty, and staff, as well as scholarly and academic collaboration and research. A Health Care Clinic may be identified primarily with one medical and health discipline and specialty, be multi-disciplinary, may support interaction involving teaching, research, or exchange of students, faculty, and staff, and may involve more than one university. This Code of Conduct applies to Health Care Personnel (as defined in this Code of Conduct) at any Health Care Clinic.

4. File a Report with the Fraud and Non-Compliance Hotline

At any point, you can contact the compliance hotline to report suspected violations. If you contact the compliance hotline, you may choose to remain anonymous.

- Click [HERE](#) to report online or visit <https://uh.edu/compliance/compliance-hotline>

CODE OF CONDUCT STANDARDS

QUALITY OF CARE

UH Health will provide quality health care to all patients in a manner that is appropriate, medically necessary, and promotes the culture of safety. UH Health recognizes the right of patients to make choices about their own care, including the right to decline recommended care or to refuse treatment. Health care providers will inform patients about the alternatives and risks associated with the care they are seeking and obtain informed consent.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All efforts will be made to protect patients' sensitive personal information.

Health Care Personnel will abide by applicable state and federal laws, including HIPAA privacy and security regulations,[†] the Texas Medical Records Privacy Act, and other laws protecting the privacy and security of a patient's sensitive personal information.

All patient information (including medical records) must be kept strictly confidential and shall not be used, discussed or disclosed unless authorized by the patient and/or required or permitted by applicable law. Only individuals whose position requires the use of confidential patient information may receive access to patient records or patient account information.

Health Care Personnel shall not reveal or disclose confidential medical staff or peer review information to those without authorization to see or obtain that information. State and federal law bestows certain privileges and provides for confidentiality of certain records including the records of medical staff and peer review bodies.

Health Care Personnel shall not reveal or disclose proprietary or trade secret information to unauthorized persons.

DISCRIMINATION

It is against the law to engage in any activities that discriminate against a patient or others on the basis of race, color, sex, genetic information, religion, age, national origin, ethnicity, disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender identity or status, gender expression, or other legally protected status. Patients also cannot be discriminated against on the basis of their ability to pay for services.

See the University of Houston System Anti-Discrimination Policy ([SAM 01.D.07](#)).

[†]Any reference in this Code of Conduct mandating compliance with HIPAA only pertains to Health Care Clinics confirmed by the Office of General Counsel and the Office of Compliance and Ethics to constitute HIPAA covered entities.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All Health Care Personnel should avoid actual or the appearance of conflicts of interest and shall not have any direct or indirect interest, financial or otherwise, that conflicts with the proper discharge of their official duties. Any potential for conflict of interest should be disclosed to your supervisor.

See the *University of Houston System Conflict of Interest Policy* ([SAM 02. A. 29](#)).

PROPER BILLING & CODING

Health Care Personnel involved in the coding, billing, accounting and documenting patient care services must comply with all applicable state and federal laws, as well as UHS policies and procedures for detecting and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse. Any subcontractors that perform billing services for UH Health must ensure compliance with billing requirements.

UH Health requires accuracy in coding, billing, accounting, and documenting. We will bill only for services that are medically necessary and rendered, and for which there is supporting documentation. All services must be accurately and completely coded and submitted to the appropriate payer in accordance with applicable law, University contracts, and UHS and other applicable University policies and procedures

It is illegal to knowingly submit false claims for payment. Submitting a false claim could include using incorrect billing codes, falsifying medical records, or billing for services that were not provided or were not medically necessary. Supporting medical documentation must be prepared for all services rendered.

UH Health shall address and respond to billing and coding inquiries and questions in a timely manner. If you have concerns about billing or coding, please follow the recommended actions in the What If I Have A Question Or Concern Section above.

CREATION & RETENTION OF RECORDS

Health Care Personnel responsible for the preparation and retention of records shall ensure that those records are accurately prepared and maintained in a manner and location in compliance with applicable law, regulations, and UHS policy and procedures.

The complete and accurate preparation and maintenance of all UH Health and patient records, by Health Care Personnel are important for providing quality care and conducting clinical business. Health Care Personnel will not knowingly create records that contain any false, fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading information. UH Health adheres to state and federal laws requiring the retention of medical records for a minimum period of time. The legal requirements on record retention vary and will depend on the type of record, the patient, and the specialty. UH Health may have policies extending the record retention period. Health Care Personnel should learn and follow the record retention policies applicable to their practice or clinic. Before any documentation is discarded, it is wise to check with your supervisor, the Office of General Counsel, or Office of Compliance & Ethics regarding the applicable record retention requirements. Disposal of medical and billing records, whether held by UH Health or a UH Health vendor must be done in a secure manner.

See *Records Retention Policy* ([SAM 03.H.01](#)) for the *UHS Record Retention Schedule*, and any policies or procedures of the applicable clinic.

COOPERATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AND GOVERNMENT REQUESTS

Health Care Personnel will cooperate fully with all appropriately authorized governmental inquiries or requests for information. Any non-routine inquiry, civil investigative demand, subpoena, or request of another agency regarding a UH Health clinic or person associated with UH Health should be immediately reported to the clinic director and Office of General Counsel.

IMPROPER PAYMENTS, DISCOUNTS, AND GIFTS

It is illegal to pay for patient referrals or to pay for a recommendation that someone buy something, such as equipment or drugs, from you, if a government health program, such as Medicare, is paying for the patient services or item. UHS policy, as well as state and federal law, prohibits payment for referrals or the acceptance of payment for the same. "Payment" does not have to be cash; it can be anything of value, including a discount, a service, or piece of equipment.

REFERRAL

It is against the law for a provider to refer patients to other providers in which they have a financial interest or relationship. Violations can result in fines and exclusions from Medicare or Medicaid. The law is complex and applies only to certain services. If you suspect that a physician or provider is referring patients improperly, you should report it to your supervisor or take the recommended actions in the What If I Have A Question Or Concern Section above.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Health Care Personnel are expected to comply with environmental laws for proper disposal of medical waste and other hazardous materials and, as such, you should have at minimum a basic understanding of the applicable laws and regulations and learn and follow the policies and procedures applicable to your practice area or clinic.

Spills or releases must be reported promptly. Any questions about waste disposal should be directed to the University's Office of Environmental Health & Safety.

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

Federal and state laws govern the handling and dispensing of controlled substances, including narcotics. UH Health will not tolerate the unauthorized distribution or possession of controlled substances.

SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT

All Health Care Personnel engaged in research are expected to conduct their research with integrity, intellectual honesty, and with appropriate regard for human subjects. All researchers must comply with legal and contractual requirements for their research and grants. Scientific misconduct includes falsification of data, plagiarism, and representing results from other studies as your own. UHS will not tolerate scientific misconduct, and will comply with applicable legal requirements and University policies to investigate and sanction that behavior.