



Position Statement on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct

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Sexual misconduct and sexual harassment in the workplace are unacceptable yet pervasive problems. It is imperative that emergency medicine (EM) must ensure a workplace culture where sexual misconduct and sexual harassment are not tolerated. Sexual harassment/misconduct are forms of discrimination that are harmful to and have negative and potentially devastating effects on the psychological and physical health of victims. Sexual harassment/misconduct undermines the very core of healthy, productive working environments and relationships – sowing mistrust and hurt. They may result in significant short- and long-term consequences for victims, perpetrators and organizational culture. The Society for Academic Emergency Medicine (SAEM) affirms that all EM physicians, staff, trainees, and students have a right to a work environment free from sexual harassment or sexual misconduct

A recent study of medical school faculty demonstrated that 82% of women and 65% of men reported sexual harassment from other employees, and 64% of women and 44% of men reported sexual harassment from patients or their families over a one-year period, including trainees[Vargas 2020; Li 2010]. The need to address sexual harassment in our field is critical to creating an inclusive and supportive environment. [Schnapp 2016]

SAEM supports the implementation and enforcement of policies consistent with “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972” (Title IX). Title IX details actions that institutions must implement to address discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation with several of these actions related to sexual harassment and misconduct. Policies and processes addressing sexual harassment and mistreatment should be reviewed on a regular basis to assure they are consistent with the needs of the organization and its employees, reflect current best practices, and are compliant with local, state, and federal laws.

Consistent with Title IX, all employees, contractors, or other individuals who engage with employees should be educated on policy content and reporting processes at the time of onboarding and via regular review of terms of employment. In addition to understanding the role of mandatory reporters and who that includes, all staff should be well-versed in institutional policies and procedures for addressing concerns for sexual misconduct/harassment. Staff and learners should be educated on what constitutes sexual misconduct/harassment, so they can respond appropriately if they are witnesses or are informed of such behavior.

SAEM advocates a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment/misconduct. Accountability must be maintained at all levels within an institution and across its domains (clinical, administrative, education, research, etc.). All reports made in good faith must be taken seriously and addressed by established policies and processes, with prompt investigation of all allegations in a respectful, confidential, and consistent manner, without fear of formal or informal retaliation. Barriers to reporting should be identified and deconstructed, and all allegations should be explored in a timely, just, and fair manner.

Beyond compliance with a regulatory statute, it is the responsibility of all organizational and departmental leadership to set supportive cultural norms and provide compassionate response to concerns. It is the responsibility of individuals to model appropriate and respectful behavior, and to engage with the reporting system as needed. The culture of individual organizations depends on our collective actions.