

# Ascension Compliance Program

A Mission based on Values and Ethics



# CEO Message

Ascension carries out its healthcare ministry consistent with the Ascension Mission, Vision and Values. Integrity is one of Ascension's Core Values. The essence of integrity is a workplace in which we follow ethical and legal business practices.

The Standards of Conduct describe the behavior and conduct expected of associates; medical staff; Board and Board Committee members; and contractors. The Standards of Conduct are intended to help you respond to questions and situations you may encounter in your daily work. Please read it carefully and consider what it says.

No Standards of Conduct can anticipate every question or substitute for each individual's sense of honesty and integrity. If you have questions about the Standards of Conduct or come across any situation which you believe violates the Standards, you should consult your Supervisor, the Compliance Officer or the Values Line at 1.800.707.2198 or [www.AscensionValuesLine.org](http://www.AscensionValuesLine.org). There will be no retaliation for asking questions or reporting possible compliance issues in good faith.

Our commitment to corporate compliance begins and ends with each individual. Thank you for joining us in our shared commitment to the Standards of Conduct.

**Anthony R. Tersigni, EdD, FACHE**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Ascension

# Standards of Conduct

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## Table of Definitions

The following words and phrases have the following meanings as used in the Standards of Conduct.

- Contractors** are third party individuals or organizations with which we do business, such as vendors that provide supplies and services.
- Retaliation** is a harmful action against an associate in response to the associate asking questions or reporting a concern.
- Values Line** is a confidential phone and internet web service for associates to report ethical and legal issues without providing their name.

# Introduction

This document details the Mission, Vision and Values of Ascension; explains the Standards of Conduct we are responsible for practicing; and describes ways for associates to find help and report ethical and legal issues.

## Responsibilities of Associates, Medical Staff, Leaders, Board and Board Committee Members and Contractors

The Standards of Conduct apply to all associates, Medical Staff members, Board and Board Committee members, and contractors. You are expected to:

- Adhere to the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services within the institution as a condition for medical privilege and employment (*cf.* ERD n. 5).
- Review and follow the Standards of Conduct, paying particular attention to those Standards of Conduct that apply to your everyday work responsibilities.
- Ask questions when you are uncertain what to do. See Page 13 on Where to Find Help.

## Responsibilities of Leaders

Leaders have a role in receiving and responding to questions and concerns raised by associates and others you lead. How you respond to these questions and concerns is key to others having the trust and confidence to bring important matters to your attention.

You are expected to:

- Serve as a role model for our Mission, Vision and Values by carrying out your responsibilities with the highest degree of personal integrity.
- Clearly communicate to others your expectations for the highest standards of ethical behavior.
- Promote a culture of trust, open communication and respect.
- Hold those you lead accountable for behavior consistent with the Standards of Conduct.
- Encourage others to raise issues and concerns so they can be addressed.
- Respond timely and appropriately to issues and concerns brought to your attention and forward concerns expressed by your staff to the Compliance Officer, Human Resources or other appropriate leaders.
- Support our policy of non-retaliation for anyone who raises issues and concerns in good faith.
- Learn and follow applicable laws and regulations that affect your work.
- Ask for assistance when you are unsure how to respond to an issue or concern.

# Introduction *continued*

## **Responsibilities of the Board and Board Committees**

Members of the Board and Board Committees have a responsibility to be informed and exercise appropriate judgment to:

- Ensure that legal and ethical business practices expressed in the Standards of Conduct guide the decisions you make on behalf of Ascension.
- Disclose any potential Conflict of Interest and take appropriate actions to address any situations that may appear to interfere with independent judgment or the duty to serve in the best interest of Ascension.
- Hold senior leadership accountable for effective policies, procedures and internal control systems that address compliance with laws and regulations and promotion of ethical business practices.
- Respond timely and appropriately to issues and concerns brought to your attention.

The following Standards of Conduct are a foundation for the behaviors that are expected from associates, the Medical Staff members, Board and Board Committee Members and Contractors.

## Standards of Conduct

# Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission, Vision, and Values provide a strong foundation and guidance for the work we do in transforming healthcare in the United States. They serve as a framework that expresses our priorities in responding to the care of those most in need.

## MISSION

Rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer, we commit ourselves to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable. Our Catholic health ministry is dedicated to spiritually centered, holistic care, which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities. We are advocates for a compassionate and just society through our actions and our words.

## VISION

We envision a strong, vibrant Catholic health ministry in the United States which will lead to the transformation of healthcare. We will ensure service that is committed to health and well-being for our communities and that responds to the needs of individuals throughout the life cycle. We will expand the role of laity, in both leadership and sponsorship, to ensure a Catholic health ministry of the future.

## VALUES

We have a common vision and are called to act upon the following ideas and beliefs:

**Service of the Poor** — Generosity of spirit, especially for persons most in need

**Reverence** — Respect and compassion for the dignity and diversity of life

**Integrity** — Inspiring trust through personal leadership

**Wisdom** — Integrating excellence and stewardship

**Creativity** — Courageous innovation

**Dedication** — Affirming the hope and joy of our ministry

## Standards of Conduct

# Relationships with Others

We will interact with others in a sincere and authentic manner. We will develop relationships with others based on honesty, fairness and mutual trust. We will act with dignity and mutual respect and will not discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, any other legally protected status or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws.

### What is Expected of Me?

- Treat others fairly, honestly and with dignity.
- Treat others respectfully, without discrimination.
- Communicate with others openly, honestly and respectfully.

**Q. I heard a co-worker making racially offensive jokes with other co-workers. It made me really uncomfortable. What should I do?**

**A. Immediately report the incident to your Supervisor, the Human Resources Department, your Compliance Officer or the Values Line.**

## Standards of Conduct

# Compliance with Laws and Regulations

We will operate in accordance with all laws and regulations applicable to Ascension.

### What is Expected of Me?

Follow all laws and regulations that apply to your work and ask for assistance if you have questions about how they affect you. Examples of laws that apply to Ascension are as follows:

- Maintain privacy and security of protected health information in keeping with HIPAA. Do not access, use, disclose or discuss protected health information with others unless permitted to do so or required by law.
- Ensure that reports or other information required to be provided to any federal, state or local government agency are filed accurately and timely to comply with applicable laws and regulations.
- Avoid discussions and collaborations with competitors about pricing, terms and other market information in compliance with Antitrust Laws.

**Q. My co-worker recently posted a notice on the associate bulletin board asking associates to join her in forming a group to support a candidate for city council. Is this allowed?**

A. No. Using Ascension's resources to participate or encourage participation in political campaign activities is not allowed and could jeopardize our tax-exempt status.

**Q. What should I do if my laptop is stolen on a weekend or after business hours?**

A. Contact your Supervisor, HIPAA Privacy Officer and the Ascension Information Services Service Desk.

## Standards of Conduct

# Human Resources

We strive to cultivate a work environment where associates are highly regarded; where they are treated honestly and respectfully; where their health and safety are protected; where they are motivated to reach their potential; where they are given the opportunity for personal and career learning and advancement; where they are provided with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their working conditions; where they are provided with the tools necessary to do their jobs well; where there are safe and adequate procedures for resolving conflicts; and where associates are recognized and rewarded for their achievements, without prejudice or discrimination.

### What is Expected of Me?

- Be supportive of others and work as a team.
- Be committed to ongoing learning, including training or educational opportunities.
- Create a workplace that fosters community and honors and cares for the dignity, safety and well-being of all persons.

**Q. I don't get along with one of my co-workers. We share certain responsibilities, but I feel like I do most of the work while he just passes the time. What should I do?**

**A.** When you have a conflict with a co-worker, the best course of action is to discuss it with the person privately. Explain what you have observed and how it affects the work of your department. If you don't see a change in behavior, notify your supervisor. You should alert your supervisor if you think the behavior may violate a law or the Standards of Conduct.

## Standards of Conduct

# Business Ethical Practices and Confidentiality

We are committed to ethical business conduct and integrity consistent with our Catholic tradition. Associates must represent the organization accurately and honestly and must not do anything that purposely defrauds anyone, including other companies or the government, of money, property, or services. Associates must take all reasonable steps to preserve and protect the organization's assets by making prudent and effective use of its resources, and properly and accurately reporting its financial condition.

Associates have access to a variety of confidential and proprietary records and data, including personally identifiable information, patient information and company trade secrets. Associates are expected to: maintain the confidentiality of all organization information; access, use and disclose confidential and proprietary information only for which they are authorized; keep confidential and proprietary information secure when not using the information; and refrain from discussing confidential and proprietary information with unauthorized personnel or outside sources.

## Standards of Conduct

# Business Ethical Practices and Confidentiality *continued*

### What is Expected of Me?

- Adhere to the highest standards of ethical business practices.
- Do not disclose confidential information related to Ascension to any outside unauthorized person or organization, or use such information for your personal benefit.
- Share confidential information about Ascension with associates only when they have a legitimate need to know the information in order to perform their job.
- Maintain confidential information, including financial data and associate related information, in a confidential and secure manner.
- Prepare all documents accurately and timely, including expense reports, time and attendance records, financial statements, and accounting records.
- Deal with regulatory agencies honestly and accurately.
- Properly use and protect Ascension resources including supplies, equipment, associate time and financial assets.
- Act only within the scope of the authority granted with your job.

**Q. Before coming to work at Ascension, I consulted for a competitor and obtained information that would help us negotiate favorable contracts. Should I share this information with others in the organization?**

**A.** No. Do not disclose confidential information learned through another job. It is unethical and possibly illegal to share confidential information you learn from your association with one employer with another employer should you leave the organization. Further, we will not be able to use this type of information in any business dealings.

# Conflicts of Interest

Associates are expected to act in a manner that is in the best interest of Ascension. Associates may not use their positions to profit personally or to assist others in profiting in any way at the expense of Ascension. In any situation where an associate's outside interests conflict with those of Ascension, the associate must disclose the conflict in accordance with the Conflicts of Interest Policy.

## What is Expected of Me?

- Follow the Ascension Conflict of Interest policy. Do not engage in any activity, practice or act that conflicts with the interests of Ascension.
- Do not make any decision or discussion affecting Ascension that might represent a conflict of interest when serving as a member of an outside organization or Board.
- Do not accept employment or consulting arrangements outside of Ascension, or make personal investments, if they interfere with your job or unduly influence the decisions you are required to make on behalf of Ascension.

**Q. My sister-in-law is a health care consultant. Would it be a conflict if I recommended her to work on a project at my organization?**

A. No, unless you do something to provide her with an advantage or special consideration or if you receive something of value in return. If you recommend your sister-in-law for the project, you should fully disclose your relationship. You should not participate in the selection decision. Also, you must not share information with your sister-in-law that other prospective vendors or consultants would not have.

# Your Voice: Where to Find Help

You may face circumstances that can leave you wondering which path to take, which choice to make and how to make it. This is particularly true when you are confronted with challenges to your ethical and legal standards.

As a responsible associate, it is your right and duty to find help and report situations that you believe may potentially violate laws, the Standards of Conduct or applicable policies. It is not a question of betraying confidence. It's a question of the continued respect and viability of our organization and professional responsibilities. There are several ways in which you can ask a question or share a concern if you do not know whether a particular action would violate laws, the Standards of Conduct or harm Ascension.

## **Your Supervisor or Manager**

This is usually the best place to start in getting answers to your questions. Your supervisor or manager may have the information you need or be able to direct you to the right resource.

## **Higher-Level Manager**

If you are not comfortable discussing a situation with your supervisor or manager or do not agree with the answer you receive, consider discussing the issue with a higher-level manager.

## **Compliance Officer**

The Compliance Officer is responsible for the Compliance Program and can assist in addressing your questions and concerns.

# Values Line

We encourage you to use one of the resources above to address your questions and concerns. If you are not comfortable contacting any of these associates or if these associates have not fully resolved your concern, you can call the Ascension Values Line at **800.707.2198** or use the Values Line website at **[www.ascensionvaluesline.org](http://www.ascensionvaluesline.org)**.

The Values Line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Your call to the Values Line is answered by an outside company. Questions may be asked of you to gather additional information. At the close of the call, you will receive a unique identification number and a specific date to call back to check on the status of your concern. You do not need to provide your name. The calls are not recorded or traced.

The outside company prepares a confidential report based on the information you provide. The report is forwarded to the Compliance Officer for review, investigation and, when appropriate, corrective action. The results of the investigation will be provided to the outside company so they may be given to you during your follow-up call.

If you use the web site, there are a series of screens that walk you through the process of preparing and submitting a report. After you submit a report, you will be provided a follow-up date, report number and Personal Identification Number.

**Q. If I report what I think is a violation of the Standards of Conduct, and no violation is found upon investigation, will I get in trouble?**

A. There will be no action taken against you for reporting a suspected violation in good faith. You do not need to provide your name when calling the Values Line.

# Appendix A – False Claims Act

## THE FALSE CLAIMS ACT

As recipients of federal health care program funds, including Medicare and Medicaid, Ministries are required by law to include in their policies and provide all associates and contractors with information about the federal False Claims Act and applicable state laws intended to prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse in federal health care programs.

## WHAT IS THE FALSE CLAIMS ACT?

The False Claims Act is a federal law that makes it a crime for any person or organization to knowingly make a false record or file a false claim with the government for payment. The False Claims Act similarly prohibits any person or organization from knowingly concealing, or knowingly and improperly avoiding or decreasing, an obligation to pay or transmit money to the government. “Knowingly” includes having actual knowledge that a claim is false, or acting in “deliberate ignorance” or “reckless disregard” as to whether a claim is false. Examples of possible false claims include billing Medicare for services that were not provided, billing for services that were provided but were not medically necessary, and submitting inaccurate or misleading claims about the types of services provided, billing for a hospital service referred by a physician with whom the hospital has a compensation arrangement that violates the Stark or Anti-Kickback Statute, and failing to timely refund an identified known overpayment received from a federal health program.

The False Claims Act contains provisions that allow individuals with original information (i.e., information not already the subject of legal proceedings or activities that have already been publicly disclosed) concerning fraud involving government programs to file a lawsuit on behalf of the government and, if the lawsuit results in a recovery, to receive a portion of recoveries received by the government.

Financial penalties to the organization for submitting a false claim can total as much as three times the amount of the claim plus a minimum per claim penalty. The current False Claims Act per claim penalty can be found in the Communities at <https://communities.ascension.org/cm/corporateresponsibility/Training%20and%20Education/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

## State Laws

In addition to federal law, several states have adopted similar laws allowing individuals to file a lawsuit in state court for false claims that were filed with the state for payment, such as the Medicaid program.

For information on State False Claims Acts refer to the Communities at this URL:

<https://communities.ascension.org/cm/corporateresponsibility/Training%20and%20Education/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

## Protections Under the False Claims Act

The federal False Claims Act protects employees from being fired, demoted, threatened or harassed by his or her employer for filing a False Claims Act lawsuit or providing information in good faith about a False Claims Act investigation or lawsuit.

## Standards of Conduct

# Acknowledgement

### **Please sign and complete the Standards of Conduct form.**

I have received my personal copy of the Standards of Conduct and agree to follow them. I understand that compliance with the Standards of Conduct is a condition of my continued employment or association with Ascension.

I will uphold the highest standard of ethical and legal business practices. I will not tolerate illegal or questionable activity and promise to identify, report and prevent such activity.

I am expected to maintain the privacy and security of all confidential information, including patient protected health information whether in paper or electronic format. I agree to adhere to Ascension policies, which includes maintaining the confidentiality of information in all electronic systems to which I have access.

I will not use, disclose or discuss confidential and protected health information with others unless permitted to do so based on my job responsibilities or as required by law.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_