

EASL CODE OF CONDUCT

Introduction – The Purpose of the Code

The EASL code of conduct serves as guidance for the association's volunteers in their capacity as board members. This code, agreed by the Ethics Committee and the Governing Board, gives guidance to support the standards of conduct required by the organization.

The principles and requirements that comprise the code and procedures are based on and are designed to ensure full compliance by EASL. These principles are intended to align full compliance with the responsibility, integrity and duties described here, and the other scientific clinical and educational activities and responsibilities of board members outside of the EASL sphere.

No set of rules or guidance can cover all eventualities and the interpretation of this document has to be in the context of the intent of this code, with the expectation that members of the Governing Board will act in the best interests of EASL and its mission.

Members of the Governing Board affirm their endorsement of the code and acknowledge their commitment to uphold its principles and obligations by accepting and retaining membership on the board.

The EASL Mission

To be the Home of Hepatology so that all who are involved with liver disease can realize their full potential to cure and prevent it.

EASL, The Home of Hepatology

- promotes research in the science of liver disease (Hepatology)
- provides state-of-the-art education for physicians and scientists
- fosters public awareness of liver diseases and their management
- acts as an advisor to European Health authorities
- facilitates scientific exchanges and catalyzes European multi-center controlled trials
- supports young investigators to ensure that the liver remains at the forefront of research

EASL Governing Board Mission

The EASL Governing Board is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in Hepatology, liver research and the clinical practice of liver disorders.

The Governing Board has the following duties:

- 1) To manage the business of the Association.
- 2) To carry out the resolutions taken at the Business Meeting
- 3) To represent the Association. The Secretary General has joint signatory power together with the Treasurer or any other person entrusted with the management and representation by the Governing Board.
- 4) To attend to all matters which are not delegated to or reserved for another functional body of the Association pursuant to the law or the Articles of Association.
- 5) To accept new Ordinary Members, Corresponding Members and Trainee Members.
- 6) In case of considerable financial gains, the Governing Board prepares proposals for approval at the Business Meeting for the destination of parts of these gains. These destinations should serve purposes that are in agreement with the aims of the Association.
- 7) To prepare proposals for alterations of the Articles of Association if necessary.
- 8) To decide about matters concerning the EASL membership fee.
- 9) To select and propose to the Business Meeting the name of the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Hepatology.

The Ethics Committee

The principal role of the Ethics Committee is to support the Governing Board to promote the highest standards of ethics in the field of hepatology and educate members on ethical issues. These tasks are accomplished by proposing and administering conflict of interest policies to the EASL Governing Board, Journal of Hepatology Editors and Editorial Board, the Executive Director as well as members of EASL Clinical Practice Guidelines panels, EASL committees and task forces, consultants, faculty, and others acting on behalf of EASL.

In addition, the Ethics Committee will review the disclosures of financial or non-financial relationships (hereafter referred to as “disclosures”), which potentially lead to conflicts of interest among the candidates for the panels charged with authoring EASL Clinical Practice Guidelines, to eliminate the potential for real or perceived bias which might undermine the integrity of the guidelines. Furthermore, the Ethics Committee will respond to complaints made by EASL members, governmental authorities or regulatory agencies about the conduct of any Governing Board member and members of any other EASL board or EASL representative.

The Ethics Committee consists of five members who are independent from the Governing Board membership. One member, elected by the Ethics Committee, performs the role of the chair. Members are proposed by the Ethics Committee for approval by the Business Meeting. Each member serves for three years.

The Ethics Committee tables guidelines for avoidance of conflicts of interest by the EASL leadership, assesses eligibility of Clinical Practice Guideline panels and monitors adherence to the code of conduct. Candidate membership of the panels is proposed by the Governing Board.

The Ethics Committee holds one face-to-face meeting per year and teleconferences as needed. Written reports are submitted to the Governing Board after each meeting.

Suggested Code of Conduct

The maintenance of public trust in EASL's integrity, ethical standards and credibility, are of paramount importance in accomplishing EASL's mission and will be protected with the utmost vigilance.

For the sake of clarity, the EASL Governing Board, the Journal of Hepatology Editors and Editorial Board, the Executive Director and the Ethics Committee constitute the EASL leadership. The EASL leadership shall at all times abide by and conform to the following code of conduct:

1. The EASL leadership will abide in all respects to this code of conduct and all other rules and regulations of the association. Furthermore, the EASL leadership will at all times obey all applicable European Union, country and local laws and regulations and will provide or cause to provide the full cooperation of the association when requested to do so by those institutions and their persons set in authority as are required to uphold the law.
2. The EASL leadership will conduct the business affairs of the association in good faith and with honesty, integrity, due diligence, and judicious competence.
3. Except as the EASL leadership may otherwise require, or as otherwise required by law, no EASL leadership member shall share, copy, reproduce, transmit, divulge or otherwise disclose any confidential information related to the affairs of the association and each member of the EASL leadership will uphold the strict confidentiality of all meetings and other deliberations and communications related to EASL affairs.
4. The EASL leadership will exercise proper authority and good judgement in their dealings with association staff, suppliers, members and the general public, and will respond to the needs of the association's members in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner.
5. No member of the EASL leadership will use any information provided by the association or acquired as a consequence of their service to the association in any manner other than in furtherance of his or her position duties. Further, no member of the EASL leadership will misuse association property or resources and will at all times keep the association's property secure.

Conflicts of Interest

EASL recognizes that professionals - especially those involved in policy-making, research, education, standard-setting, fund-raising or advocacy - are subject to potential conflicts of interest.

Conflicts of interest are defined as any circumstances that create a risk that professional judgements or actions regarding a primary interest, as stated in the mission of EASL, will be unduly influenced by a secondary financial or non-financial interest (for example, intellectual conflict of interest, membership in the governing board of other organizations, or institutional or corporate associations).

EASL recognizes the need to have a policy that ensures proper balance, independence, objectivity and scientific rigor in governance and in education, research, health policy and all other activities sponsored by EASL. Careful compliance will inspire confidence, will avoid both actual bias and the appearance of bias, and will comply with legal and regulatory standards.

Criteria for Assessment of Conflicts of Interest

EASL shares the policies and criteria for assessing conflicts of interest adopted by other scientific societies (such as the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases, the American Gastroenterological Association, and the Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe¹). As stated, “conflicts of interest are rarely, if ever, “entirely absent” or “clearly present”, but rather vary in their relationship to specific situations. Accordingly, the Ethics Committee will judge the possibility of any perceived conflicts to assess the risk of conflicts which could prejudice decision-making, and thus harm balanced and impartial thinking, judgements and choices. ² EASL has chosen to align their code of conduct with the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and based on this code’s definition of a conflict of interest, the Ethics Committee will use the following major criteria when assessing a conflict:

1. What is the financial value of the secondary interest involved?
2. What is the scope of the relationship(s) of the individual being assessed, with the party or parties associated with the secondary interest?
3. Does the circumstance involve the sole discretion of the particular individual being assessed?
4. What is the value (and risk) (either direct financial or “in-kind”) to EASL of the interest that could be affected by a conflict?
5. What are the consequences to EASL that could ensue from broad public disclosure of the conflict?

Questions 1, 2 and 3 evaluate the potential that a conflict could impair impartial decision-making, while questions 4 and 5 assess the degree of harm to EASL that could result from conflicts of interest and their disclosure.

¹ <https://www.biomedeuropa.org/code-of-conduct.html>;
<https://www.gastro.org/about/people/committees/COIPolicy7-13.pdf>;
<http://www.aasld.org/sites/default/files/documents/AASLD%20COIPolicy2013March.pdf>
² <http://www.aasld.org/sites/default/files/documents/AASLD%20COIPolicy2013March.pdf>

After review and discussion of an individual's potential conflict(s) of interest and its (their) degree, the Ethics Committee will, by voting according to this code, evaluate whether a conflict exists and whether the degree of the conflict is such that management of the conflict requires more than simple disclosure to the Ethics Committee. Based on the criteria outlined above, the Ethics Committee, by a majority vote, will provide an evaluation of the situation with a colour code (green – no problem, orange – potentially risky conflict, red – high risk conflict of interest) to the Governing Board.

Depending on the situation, the Ethics Committee can also request recusal, withdrawal of consideration for a nominated position, EASL-independent review, divestiture or any other appropriate management of the conflict. The recommendation of the Ethics Committee will be forwarded to the Governing Board for its approval and enforcement. If the matter involves an individual who is a Member of the Governing Board, that Member will recuse themselves from any deliberations involving that matter.³

Financial or in-kind support or gifts to EASL leadership or EASL business activities

Industry funding (i.e.: pharma, medical devices, etc.) will not be accepted for a meeting of an EASL deliberative body at which EASL business or policy development is the primary focus, or the development of practice guidelines.

Rules & special considerations for the Secretary General, Governing Board members, EASL Executive Director, Editor in Chief, Co-Editors and Clinical Practice Guideline panel members are tabulated below.

³ Idem.

Activity	Secretary General (during his/her term)	Other Governing Board Members and EASL Executive Director	Journal Editor-in- Chief	Journal Co-Editors	Clinical Practice Guidelines Panel Members
Governing Board position in related International Society or Foundation (except the EILF)	Not permitted*	Permissible - Disclose	Not permitted*	Permissible - Disclose	Permissible - Disclose
Scientific Consultant for pharmaceutical and biomedical industries	Not permitted*	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Not permitted*	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis
Speaker or author in educational activities supported by industry for promotional purposes	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis
Speaker in industry sponsored satellite activities during official EASL meetings	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis
Employee, Officer, Director in corporate company producing/marketing/distributing devices, drugs, etc. **	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose

* Generally not permitted (consult Ethics Committee on individual basis)

Activity	Secretary General (during his/her term)	Other Governing Board Members and EASL Executive Director	Journal Editor-in- Chief	Journal Co-Editors	Clinical Practice Guidelines Panel Members
Employee, Officer, Director or stock holder in University start up or spin off **	Permissible - Disclose	Permissible - Disclose	Permissible - Disclose	Permissible - Disclose	Permissible - Disclose
Stock/Stock Options in pharmaceutical and biomedical industries and companies engaging in EASL activities**	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount	Not permitted	Not permitted	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount
Grants/Research Support from pharmaceutical and biomedical industries	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis and whether it was paid to him/her as individual or his/her institution	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis and whether it was paid to them as individual or their institution	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis and whether it was paid to him/her as individual or his/her institution	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis and whether it was paid to them as individual or their institution	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis and whether it was paid to them as individual or their institution
Intellectual Property Rights, Patents, Royalties **	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible - Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis
Honoraria and travel for CME if criteria for unrestricted educational content are met	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis
Pharmaceutical company sponsored Travel and Accommodation to meetings of continental societies	EASL funding advisable	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount	JHEP funding advisable	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount	Permissible – Disclose and indicate amount on an annual basis

** Restrictions and disclosure also apply to 1st degree family members

Disclosure

It is required that all members of the EASL leadership and members of EASL Clinical Practice Guidelines panels, EASL committees and task forces, consultants, faculty and others acting on behalf of EASL will disclose any real and potential conflicts of interest according to the code of conduct. Candidates for elected or appointed EASL positions will be informed of and asked to comply with the conflict of interest policy. Their disclosures will require evaluation and ratification by the Ethics Committee prior to their appointment by the Governing Board.

For the Secretary General and Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Hepatology, disclosures should be made public. For other constituents as outlined above, disclosures will be reviewed internally.

It is required that appointed and elected members of the EASL Governing Board, Committees and Editors of EASL publications will sign the EASL Disclosure document at the beginning of each term of service and update annually.

Accordingly, all candidates for elected office in the Governing Board, Editorial Board, Clinical Practice Guidelines panels or committees, upon selection as candidates, shall be provided with the EASL disclosure document. Relationships declared by individuals will not be publically disclosed beyond the necessities of the EASL role or activity in question.

Management of Conflict of Interest

For each potential conflict of interest identified by the Ethics Committee, the Executive Committee (Secretary General, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Director) will determine whether the organization should:

- (a) Take action or
- (b) Disclose the situation more broadly and invite discussion/resolution by the full Governing Board concerning what action to take, or
- (c) Indicate that no further action is required.

In most cases, the broadest disclosure possible is advisable so that decision-makers can make informed decisions that are in the best interests of the organization.

If brought to the Governing Board, the fact that a conflict was managed and the outcome will be documented in the minutes of the Governing Board meetings.

In the event of a dispute respecting the appropriate management in any situation involving a real or potential conflict of interest with an EASL matter, the Governing Board of EASL shall have the final authority to determine whether, in fact, a conflict exists and how that conflict should be managed or resolved.

Breaches of the Code

This is a code of self-regulation through which EASL leadership remind themselves of their responsibility to act individually and collectively in the spirit of the code and in pursuit of the aims of the Association.

EASL Members should raise concerns about compliance with this code with the Ethics Committee.

Based on the available documentation, the Ethics Committee will provide a report to the Executive Committee and follow the procedure mentioned under the paragraph “Management of Conflicts of Interest”.

This code of conduct was adopted by the EASL Governing Board on April 21st, 2017.

This code of conduct was adopted by the EASL Assembly on April 21st, 2017.