



PROCEDURE FOR MANAGING INQUIRIES AND ALLEGATIONS OF NONCOMPLIANCE THAT ARISE OUTSIDE OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The Southern States CME Collaborative (SSCC) has a multitiered accreditation process for evaluating a Provider's compliance with the Rules of the SSCC and ACCME. As an additional safeguard, this Policy Regarding Inquiries and Allegations of Noncompliance (this "Policy") is implemented in response to concerns about Providers' compliance with the SSCC's and ACCME's Rules that arise outside of the accreditation process. This Policy is effective with regards to proceedings for which a Notice of Inquiry or a Notice of Immediate Suspension is sent by ACCME on or after April 1, 2024. The SSCC reserves the right to amend this Policy at any time. This Policy is subject to regular review to ensure it continues to support the mission of the SSCC.

A. DEFINITIONS

"ACCME" means the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education.

"ACCME-Initiated Concern" means a concern identified by ACCME, including without limitation as a result of communications with third parties.

"ACCME Policies" means all policies made available to Providers by ACCME.

"ACCME's Rules" means ACCME Policies, Standards for Integrity and Independence in Accredited Continuing Education, and accreditation criteria required by the ACCME.

"Adverse Action" means a reduction of a Provider's accreditation to Probation or Non-accreditation.

"ARC" means the SSCC Accreditation Review Committee.

"Delivery" or "Delivered" means the date that the SSCC or the ACCME sends a written communication to a Provider via email.

"Independent Reviewer" means a clinician with relevant content expertise who has completed the disclosure and conflict of interest process for one of SSCC's member state medical societies or ACCME and for whom all conflicts have been resolved and documented, as determined by SSCC in its sole discretion.

"Notice of Alleged Noncompliance" means a written notice which explains why the Provider is in violation of SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules.

“Notice of Inquiry” means a written notice which states that a Provider may not be in compliance with SSCC’s or/and ACCME’s Rules and, to the extent known, which aspects of the Provider’s activities or conduct may not comply with SSCC’s or/and ACCME’s Rules.

“Notice of Noncompliance” means a written notice that includes the following: the SSCC ARC found the Provider in noncompliance; corrective action required of the Provider, if any; any Adverse Action or other action described in Section C.6.ii of this Policy; and a statement that if the notice includes an Adverse Action, the Provider has the right to request a reconsideration of the change in accreditation status pursuant to the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy.

“Provider” means an SSCC accredited provider.

“Reconsideration and Appeal Policy” means the SSCC Procedures for Reconsideration and Appeal of Adverse Actions.

“SSCC-Initiated Concern” means a concern identified by SSCC, including without limitation as a result of communications with third parties.

“SSCC Policies and Procedures” means all policies and procedures made available to Providers by the SSCC.

“SSCC Rules” means the SSCC’s Policies and Procedures.

“Third-Party Concern” means concerns raised by third parties in writing regarding a Provider’s compliance with the SSCC’s and/or ACCME’s Rules, including concerns submitted online using the SSCC’s or the ACCME’s complaint form.

B. INQUIRY PROCESS

1. The SSCC will review Third-Party Concerns and SSCC- and ACCME-Initiated Concerns that arise outside of the accreditation process.
2. If SSCC determines in its sole discretion that a Third-Party Concern or an SSCC- or ACCME-Initiated Concern does not relate to a Provider’s compliance with SSCC’s or ACCME’s Rules, then the matter will be closed, and SSCC will notify in writing any third parties that submitted Third-Party Concerns that it will not open an inquiry.
3. If SSCC, in its sole discretion, determines that a Third-Party Concern or an SSCC- or ACCME-Initiated Concern merits further review, then SSCC shall send the Provider a Notice of Inquiry, which shall include a redacted copy of any Third-Party Concern, or state that the issue being addressed is an SSCC- or ACCME-Initiated Concern. The name of the third party that submitted the Third-Party Concern will be redacted and will not be disclosed to the Provider. The Notice of Inquiry may request that the Provider transmit information to SSCC. The Notice of Inquiry shall include a copy of this Policy and the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy. SSCC will notify in writing any third parties that submitted Third-Party Concerns that it will open an inquiry. SSCC will not communicate further with third parties concerning the status or results of the inquiry other than to inform a third party that a matter has been resolved without indicating the resolution, in keeping with the Confidentiality policy described in Section D below.

4. The Provider shall transmit any information requested by SSCC in the Notice of Inquiry within twenty-one (21) days of Delivery of such Notice of Inquiry. If SSCC requests additional information, the Provider shall provide such information within fourteen (14) days of Delivery of such further request. At any time during an inquiry process, the Provider may send SSCC a written notice stating that the Provider did/does not comply with one or more of SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules identified in said notice, in which case the SSCC shall have the right to take any of the actions described in Section C.6 of this Policy; provided, however, that if SSCC in its sole discretion believes that the Provider may have violated SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules other than those identified in the Provider's notice, SSCC may continue an inquiry.
5. As part of an inquiry related to SSCC's and ACCME's content validity policies, the Provider shall submit to the SSCC, or provide access to, an unaltered set of all CME materials (e.g., audio/video recordings, slides or other content outlines, program book or other handouts) related to the CME activity at issue. If, upon receipt of the materials, SSCC determines that an objective content review of the activity is necessary to determine compliance, SSCC will seek independent content reviews by at least two (2) Independent Reviewers. The Provider will pay any costs related to the review of the activity in excess of an amount which is determined by SSCC in its sole discretion, which amount will be posted on the SSCC member state medical societies' websites. The Provider has the option to submit its own independent content review to the SSCC within twenty-one (21) days of Delivery of the Notice of Inquiry.
6. SSCC, in its sole discretion, shall make a determination regarding compliance or noncompliance of the Provider. If SSCC makes a finding of compliance, the Provider shall be notified of the finding and the matter will be closed.
7. The statute of limitations for initiation of a Notice of Inquiry or a Notice of Alleged Noncompliance is: (a) twelve (12) months from the date a live activity ended, or in the case of a series, twelve (12) months from the date of the session which is in question; or (b) twelve months from the date that an enduring material expires; provided, however, that if a Notice of Inquiry is Delivered within the statute of limitations with respect to a matter, then a Notice of Alleged Noncompliance regarding such matter may be Delivered to a Provider even if it is after the end date set by the statute of limitations, and the proceeding regarding such Notice of Alleged Noncompliance may continue.

C. PROCESS FOR ALLEGATIONS OF NONCOMPLIANCE

1. If SSCC, in its sole discretion, concludes that a Provider is in noncompliance with SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules, SSCC shall send the Provider a Notice of Alleged Noncompliance. SSCC may send a Provider a Notice of Alleged Noncompliance without having conducted an inquiry as described in Section B of this Policy. If the alleged noncompliance relates to a violation of SSCC 's or/and ACCME's content validity policies, the Notice of Alleged Noncompliance shall include copies of any Independent Reviewers' reports which are redacted so as to not disclose the identity of the Independent Reviewers. The redaction will remove the name and details of credentials which may reveal the identity of the

Independent Reviewer. The Notice of Alleged Noncompliance shall include a copy of this Policy and the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy.

2. The Provider shall have the right to submit written materials, including, if the Provider desires, its own independent content review, which rebut the alleged noncompliance identified in the Notice of Alleged Noncompliance within thirty (30) days of Delivery of the Notice of Alleged Noncompliance. At any time a Provider may send SSCC a written notice stating that the Provider did/does not comply with one or more of SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules identified in said notice, in which case the SSCC shall have the right to take any of the actions described in Section C.6 of this Policy; provided, however, that if SSCC in its sole discretion determines that the Provider has violated SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules other than those identified in the Provider's notice, the SSCC shall send the Provider written notice of such determination and shall continue the process described in this Policy with respect to a Notice of Alleged Noncompliance.
3. SSCC has the right to submit any materials received from the Provider for independent content review by at least one Independent Reviewer. In addition, the SSCC has the right to request one or more individuals and/or committees to review and make recommendations regarding any matters which are being reviewed pursuant to this Policy.
4. SSCC shall review the materials submitted by the Provider as well as any content review reports requested by SSCC.
5. If SSCC, in its sole discretion, makes a finding of compliance, SSCC shall notify the Provider of the finding and the matter will be closed.
6. If SSCC, in its sole discretion, makes a preliminary finding of noncompliance, the preliminary finding of noncompliance and a recommendation for corrective action shall be sent to the SSCC Accreditation Review Committee. The ARC shall in its sole discretion make a determination as to whether to issue a finding of compliance or noncompliance and what corrective action, if any, shall be required from the Provider in the event of noncompliance, and whether to take an Adverse Action and/or other any other action described in Section C.6.ii below.
 - i. If the ARC makes a finding of compliance, SSCC shall notify the Provider of the finding and that the matter will be closed.
 - ii. If the ARC makes a finding of noncompliance, SSCC shall send the Provider a Notice of Noncompliance. SSCC, in its sole discretion, may also take the following actions when it sends the Provider a Notice of Noncompliance:
 - a. The SSCC may require the Provider to submit documentation of corrective action within thirty (30) days of Delivery of the Notice of Noncompliance. If an activity is found to be in noncompliance with the ACCME Standard for Integrity and Independence 1 (*Ensure Content is Valid*) or Standard for Integrity and Independence 2 (*Prevent Commercial Bias in Marketing in Accredited Continuing Education*), or Standard for Integrity and Independence 3.2 (*Exclude Owners Or Employees Of Ineligible Companies*) the Provider is required to provide corrective information to the learners, faculty and planners (the "Corrective Information"). The Provider shall

submit a copy of the proposed Corrective Information to SSCC for SSCC's approval or modification prior to providing such Corrective Information to the learners, faculty and planners, and SSCC shall have the sole discretion to determine the content of the Corrective Information. In addition, SSCC shall have the right to direct that learners, faculty and planners be informed by the Provider that in the opinion of SSCC, certain information presented to the learners does not meet the ACCME standards for content validity, and that in SSCC's opinion a learner should not rely upon such information.

- b. The SSCC may require the Provider to submit a monitoring progress report at a time determined by the SSCC;
 - c. The SSCC may declare that a Provider no longer is accredited with commendation; and
 - d. The SSCC may take an Adverse Action, in which case the Provider shall be informed of its right to request a reconsideration pursuant to the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy.
7. If a Provider fails to convert noncompliance to compliance via documentation of corrective action and/or monitoring progress report, SSCC, in its sole discretion, reserves the right to take an Adverse Action, in which case the Provider shall be informed of its right to request a reconsideration pursuant to the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy.
 8. If the Provider is found in noncompliance, documents related to the review of such noncompliance (such as the Notice of Inquiry, Notice of Alleged Noncompliance, Provider's response, documentation of corrective action, and monitoring progress report) will be placed in the Provider's file and made available to the survey team and ARC as part of the SSCC's future reaccreditation process.
 9. Any communication to a Provider of an Adverse Action, other than those described in Section E below and F, shall include a statement that the Provider has thirty (30) days from Delivery of the communication to the Provider to request reconsideration under the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy and that the change in accreditation status will not become effective until the end of the thirty (30) day period if the Provider does not ask for reconsideration, or until the end of the process under the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy if the Provider does ask for reconsideration. When a Provider requests a reconsideration on a timely basis, then the Provider shall not be required to perform any corrective action until the completion of the process under the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy.
 10. At any point during any process described in this Policy, the SSCC reserves the right to require an immediate full or focused accreditation survey, including a full or focused self-study report and interview.
 11. In keeping with best practice, Providers shall afford whistleblower protection to their employee, when/if a Third-Party Concern is submitted by an employee of the Provider.
 12. SSCC has the right, in its sole discretion, to grant extensions with respect to any time requirement contained in this Policy.

13. During the processes described in the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy, members of the ARC shall not participate in any vote which relates to whether to change the accreditation status of the Provider.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

To the extent feasible, SSCC will not disclose the identity of the third party that submitted the Third-Party Concern during the process set forth in this Policy, but such third party's identity may be evident due to the circumstances of the Third-Party Concern, and such third party's identity may be revealed in a legal proceeding. The inquiry process and findings, and the process for allegations of noncompliance and findings will be kept confidential by SSCC, with the exception of SSCC's response to a lawful subpoena or other legal process; provided, however, that SSCC reserves the right to make public the noncompliance issue without naming the Provider which was in noncompliance; and provided further that SSCC shall publish changes to the Provider's accreditation status. The identity and credentials of the Independent Content Reviewers engaged by SSCC as described in this Policy shall not be disclosed to the Provider or to the public.

E. CHANGE IN ACCREDITATION STATUS DUE TO FAILURE TO RESPOND, ACT, OR COMPLY WITH A COURSE OF CORRECTIVE ACTION OR MONITORING REQUIREMENT

SSCC shall have the right to take an Adverse Action with respect to a Provider without following any other process described in this Policy if a Provider is determined by SSCC, in its sole discretion, to:

1. have not submitted information required by this Policy within ten (10) days after the prescribed deadline;
2. have not taken action required by this Policy within ten (10) days after the prescribed deadline;
3. have not submitted a monitoring progress report within ten (10) days after the prescribed deadline; and/or
4. have not submitted documentation of corrective action within ten (10) days after the prescribed deadline.

Changes in accreditation status described in this paragraph shall not entitle the Provider to review under the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy and shall not require review by the Decision Committee.

If a Provider submits documentation of corrective action but the SSCC in its sole discretion determines that such action does not demonstrate compliance with SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules, or if a Provider submits a monitoring progress report and the SSCC determines in its sole discretion that the actions reported do not show compliance with SSCC's or/and ACCME's Rules, then SSCC reserves the right in its sole discretion to take an Adverse Action. The Provider shall have the right to request reconsideration under the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy within thirty (30) days from the Delivery of a communication to the Provider

of an Adverse Action under the circumstances described in the immediately preceding sentence.

F. IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION

In the event of a Third-Party Concern or an SSCC- or ACCME-Initiated Concern that identifies a credible allegation against a Provider, as determined in SSCC's sole discretion, that poses an immediate danger to patients of learners, SSCC shall have the ability to immediately suspend such Provider's accreditation status. In event of such suspension, SSCC will send a written notice of the suspension to the Provider and advise the Provider that the Provider is entitled to appeal of such determination in accordance with Section B of the Reconsideration and Appeal Policy