

VANDERBILT  UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL CENTER

**Policy:** Relationships in the Workplace

Category	Human Resources
Approval Date	April 2016
Effective Date	April 2016
Supersedes	April 2012

**Applicable to**

VUMC

**Team Members Performing**

All faculty & staff     Faculty & staff providing direct patient care or contact     MD     House Staff     APRN/PA     RN     LPN  
 Other:

**Responsible Committee**

Human Resources

**I. Policy:**

Vanderbilt University Medical Center (“VUMC”) is committed to maintaining an environment in which members of the VUMC community can work together to further education, research, patient care and community service. This policy provides guidelines for visitors in the workplace, family members working at VUMC and relationships at work.

**II. Procedure:**

**A. Visiting the Workplace**

Children, family members, associates or friends are welcome for occasional, brief visits in the workplace, as set forth in this policy. Children may not visit the workplace if their presence conflicts with department policy, federal or state law. Staff may bring children to appropriate VUMC-sponsored programs and activities. Supervisors may approve non-routine visits that do not interfere with a staff member's ability to perform his/her work functions or the productivity of a work unit.

**Family Members Working at VUMC**

As a large employer, VUMC does have members from the same family who work at VUMC. However, employment of family members in situations where one family member has direct influence over the other's conditions of employment (including, without limitation, salary, hours worked, shifts, performance reviews, etc.) is inappropriate. For the

purpose of this policy, family members are defined as spouse, domestic partner, daughter, son, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sister, brother, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law or brother-in-law.

In some cases, a concern over conflict of interest<sup>1</sup> may arise involving other close relatives - such as aunts, uncles, cousins, or relatives by marriage. In any case, when staff are unsure about a potential conflict, they should fully disclose the circumstances in writing to their supervisor or through the conflict of interest site.

If one family member has influence over another family member's conditions of employment, the following should occur:

The employee(s) should notify their supervisor or manager immediately of the relationship and in collaboration with the supervisor, the involved employees are provided 30 days to make a decision regarding a change. Options include, but are not limited to:

1. One employee may apply to transfer to another area; or,
2. Reassignment within the department to ensure that one employee no longer has direct influence over the other employee's conditions of employment ; or,
3. One employee elects to resign.

If a decision is not reached by the end of the 30-day period, the department head, or next level of administrator, resolves the situation.

## B. Relationships at Work

1. Staff are encouraged to socialize and develop professional relationships in the workplace provided that these relationships do not interfere with the work performance of either individual or with the effective functioning of the workplace. Staff who engage in personal relationships (including romantic and sexual relationships) have awareness of their professional responsibilities and are responsible for assuring that the relationship does not raise concerns about favoritism, bias, ethics and conflicts of interest. In cases of doubt, staff seek advice and counsel from their supervisor or manager or Human Resources or VUMC Conflict of Interest department. Romantic or sexual relationships between staff members where one individual has influence or control over the other's conditions of employment are inappropriate. These relationships, even if consensual, may ultimately result in conflict

or difficulties in the workplace. If such a relationship currently exists or develops, it must be disclosed immediately:

- a. The supervisor or staff member who has influence or control over the other's conditions of employment has an obligation to disclose his/her relationship to their supervisor, manager, Human Resources or through the conflict of interest system.
- b. The other staff member involved in the relationship is encouraged to disclose the relationship to either their supervisor, manager, Human Resources Consultant or through the conflict of interest system.

#### C. Relationships with Students

When staff/faculty members interact with students, staff/faculty are in a position of trust and power. These relationships may jeopardize the effective functioning of VUMC by the appearance of either favoritism or unfairness in the exercise of professional judgment. In relationships with students, the staff/faculty member is expected to be aware of his/her professional responsibilities and to avoid apparent or actual conflict of interest, favoritism, or bias.

Consensual sexual relationships are prohibited between a student and a staff or faculty member who is in a position to exercise power or authority over that student. Efforts by staff or faculty members to initiate these relationships are also prohibited. A violation of this policy by a staff member or faculty is grounds for the Performance Management process or Faculty Discipline Process, up to and including discharge.

Consensual sexual relationships between a student and a staff OR Faculty member who is not in a position to exercise direct power or authority over that student may also be inappropriate. Any staff or faculty member who engages in such a relationship must accept responsibility for assuring that it does not result in a conflict of interest or raise other issues of professionalism. In cases of doubt, staff seek advice and counsel from their supervisor or manager or Human Resources.

#### D. General

If a relationship is deemed to be inappropriate under these guidelines, the supervisor or manager, after consultation with Human Resources, will take appropriate action. Actions taken may include, but are not limited to, an agreed-upon transfer, a change in shift, a change in reporting structure, the Performance Management process, resignation or discharge.

If staff, whether or not involved in the relationship, believe they have been, or are being, adversely affected, are encouraged to contact Human Resources.

When relationships develop into situations that may be viewed as harassment or discrimination, staff members should refer to the [HR - Anti-Harassment, Non-Discrimination and Anti-Retaliation](#) policy and the [HR - VUMC Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#) policy. If questions or concerns arise regarding potential harassment or discrimination, the staff member should contact Human Resources.

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This policy is intended as a guideline to assist in the consistent application of VUMC policies and programs for staff. The policy does not create a contract implied or expressed, with any VUMC staff members, who are employees at will. VUMC reserves the right to modify this policy in whole or in part, at any time, at the discretion of VUMC.

### III. Approval:

Traci Nordberg  
Chief Human Resources Officer

Dr. Jeffrey Balser, M.D, Ph.D  
President & CEO, Vanderbilt Medical Center  
Dean, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

### IV. References:

VUMC Policy Manual (2015). Retrieved from <https://vanderbilt.policytech.com>

Compliance Category  
Conflict of Interest

Human Resources Category:  
[HR - Anti-Harassment, Non-Discrimination and Anti-Retaliation](#)  
[HR - VUMC Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#)  
[HR - Performance Accountability and Commitment](#) [HR - Progressive Discipline](#)

[VUMC HR Policy FAQs and Forms](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the Conflict of Interest Policy.