

## ISCB ASC 2018 Code of Conduct Response Team Report

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2018-09-04

The International Society of Clinical Biostatistics and Australian Statistics Conference (ISCB ASC) 2018, which took place between August 26 and August 30 2018 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, was the first of both the ISCB and Statistical Society of Australia (SSA) conferences that had a Code of Conduct (CoC) in place. This CoC, available at <https://iscbasc2018.com/code-of-conduct/>, described unacceptable behaviours and the possible consequences of engaging in these behaviours. The members of the CoC Response Team were also listed on the website with their picture.

The CoC was a slightly modified version of that provided in the draft “Safe SSA” committee report (to be made public at a later date). The CoC was available on the ISCB ASC 2018 website, at <https://iscbasc2018.com/code-of-conduct/>. This link was accessible as the first section under the “General Information” tab on the conference website. Photographs and email addresses of the CoC Response Team were also included on the website on the same webpage.

Abbreviated versions of the CoC were also available in the conference booklet, which was printed and included in conference bags handed to all conference delegates at registration, together with the email addresses of CoC Response Team members (photos not included in the booklet due to space restrictions). The conference app also included an abbreviated version of the CoC. Copies of the CoC, with photos and email addresses of the Response Team, were available at the registration desk.

During the conference, all members of the CoC Response Team wore a badge (round, 8.9cm in diameter) indicating that they were part of the CoC Response Team. The image on the badge is shown in Figure 1: a photograph in shades of blue and black of Flinders Street Station (a local Melbourne landmark), with “Code of Conduct Response Team” in white text in the centre of the badge.

Prior to the conference, CoC Response Team members were given the opportunity to comment on the CoC. The week before the conference, an email was sent to CoC Response Team members giving some guidance on how to deal with any reported breaches.

The CoC was mentioned by Kate Lee (Local Organising Committee chair and member of the CoC Response Team) during her opening address to the conference on Monday 26 August. Her presentation included a slide with an image of the badges worn by CoC Response Team members, and the names and email addresses of CoC Response Team members. In her speech, Kate mentioned that sexual harassment, or harassment of any kind, would not be tolerated at the conference. The conference twitter account, @iscbasc2018, sent out tweets stating that the conference had a CoC with the image on the CoC Response Team badges, and was mentioned in Facebook messages from the conference Facebook page. The CoC was also included in promoted posts on the conference app. Further, the CoC was also mentioned in the welcome letter sent to delegates prior to the conference, and the link at which they could find the CoC was included.

That both the SSA and the ISCB agreed to have a CoC in place for this conference was a positive step. Scott Sisson and Adrian Barnett in particular (the former and current SSA Presidents, respectively) were very keen for this conference to institute a CoC, and have been very supportive of the Safe SSA committee more generally. This was the first time that members of the Response Team had been

involved in a CoC. Given the lack of experience with CoCs, we expected that we would learn a lot from our experience, and get some things wrong.

Some incidents were reported to and/or witnessed by Code of Conduct Response Team: these were responded to via email or telephone as appropriate. All of the incidents of which the Response Team were made aware of were either witnessed by a Response Team member or reported to a Response Team member by someone who already knew that team member. Given this, it seems as though it is important to include people on the Response Team who are already well-known and trusted by conference attendees. This may include key members of conference committees, as these people may be among the most well-known at a conference.

The post-conference survey included a question regarding whether or not attendees were aware of the Code of Conduct. Of 80 attendees who responded to this question (out of a total of 81 who had responded to at least one question in the survey by October 1 2018), 68 (85%) stated that they were aware of the CoC.

#### **What we did right:**

The CoC we had in place was modelled very closely on the recommended one for SSA events (soon to be made public in the Safe SSA committee report). The fact that the CoC explicitly listed behaviours that were unacceptable, possible consequences of engaging in those behaviours, and displayed the names, photos, and email addresses of members of a response team was also a strength of our CoC.

The fact that the CoC was explicitly mentioned at the conference opening ceremony, tweeted about, and available on the website, conference app, and as a hard copy meant that conference attendees had a number of opportunities to become aware of the CoC.

The badges worn by CoC Response Team members helped make the Response Team members visible at the conference. Many Response Team members noted that these badges led to questions from other attendees about what the badges were for, and about the CoC more generally. The choice of badge design was deliberately soft and non-threatening.

We aimed for diversity across gender, race, and career stage in the Response Team. Members of the Response Team were volunteers from the Local Organising Committee, and/or well known to the head of the Response Team (JK). The head of the Response Team selected Response Team members who, in her judgement, could be trusted to uphold the CoC. At future conferences there will be the opportunity to include members who have experience in acting on CoC Response Teams.

#### **What could have been improved:**

The biggest issue was the lack of training of Response Team members: although some members have gone to workshops discussing how to deal with disclosures of sexual assault, none had undergone training specifically outlining how to deal with breaches of a conference CoC. Although some guidance on how to deal with reports of incidents was provided, this guidance was minimal. We recommend that the CoC Response Team meet face-to-face in the lead up to the conference to discuss potential issues and how these could be dealt with.

It is important to reflect a range of people with a range of different experiences when including members in a CoC Response Team, and we aimed to put together a diverse

Response Team. However, all members of the Response Team were based in Melbourne, and lacked (among other characteristics) religious diversity. Further, given the way in which the CoC Response Team was selected, there were many pre-existing professional relationships between Response Team members. This may be problematic in situations in which someone wishes to report an incident involving a member of the Response Team. However, members of the Response Team are required to uphold the CoC, and thus including people who are less well known to the head of the CoC Response Team could lead to problems.

Although we put a lot of effort into making the CoC visible, there were still attendees of the conference who were unaware of the CoC, even towards the end of the conference. In addition to the ways in which we made the CoC visible, we would recommend also including a CoC notice on the notice board of the conference (if such a thing exists). A slide between sessions/talks noting how to identify CoC members may also be helpful. Further, we would recommend that if a CoC Response Team member cannot be located, that the person wishing to speak to a CoC member go to the Registration desk, who can then locate a CoC Response Team member. Making Response Team members more visible could also be useful: although the badges did provoke some discussion, they were only visible from the front. However, forcing response team members to wear particular items of clothing (e.g. a t-shirt) does not seem to be a good way forward: it may discourage certain people from participating as CoC Response Team members.

Some attendees may have found the CoC to be somewhat confronting, particularly given that this was the first ISCB or Statistical Society of Australia conference to have a CoC in place. We hope that as CoCs become more commonplace, attendees at events feel more comfortable in reporting incidents that they may have experienced or witnessed.



Figure 1: Image used on the Code of Conduct Response Team badge