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VHA NATIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE UPDATE

Founded in 1986, the National Ethics Committee (NEC) is an interdisciplinary group charged by the Under Secretary for Health to issue reports on ethics-related topics. Each report describes an ethical issue, summarizes its historical context, discusses its relevance to VHA, reviews current controversies, and outlines practical recommendations. Scholarly yet practical, these reports are intended to heighten awareness of ethical issues and to improve the quality of health care, both within and beyond VHA. Over the years reports have served as resources for educational programs, guides for patient care practices, and catalysts for health policy reform. Topics range from futility to resource allocation to research on subjects with impaired consent capacity.

The NEC now has a new charter that defines the Committee's structure, functions, and processes. The NEC is authorized by the Office of the Under Secretary for Health through the National Center for Ethics. One of the goals of the Center is to provide guidance on topics of national significance by articulating accepted ethical standards and guidelines. The National Ethics Committee provides a formal mechanism for accomplishing that goal.

The NEC is advisory to the Under Secretary for Health. Reports are approved and issued periodically through the Under Secretary's Office.

The NEC has recently completed two reports that are due for release this month; "Do-Not-Resuscitate Orders and Medical Futility," and "Advance Proxy Planning for Residents of Long Term Care Facilities Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity."

[VHA National Ethics Committee Charter](#)