

FROM THE FIELD

South Texas Veterans Health Care System offers ethics certificate seminar.

The South Texas Veterans Health Care System Ethics Advisory Committee held an Ethics Certificate Seminar on October 9 and 10, 2001. This 16-hour course, led by Max Metcalf, Emeritus VA Chaplain and former member of the VHA National Ethics Committee, covered a brief history of bioethics, relevant court cases, the Jonsen/ Siegler/Winslade model of clinical ethics decision making, and application of the model to ethics consultation cases. The 54 participants talked, challenged, and learned together over the two-day period. About half of the attendees were from VA, while the other half were from outside. The event was sponsored by the Employee Education System. For the first time the V-Tel system was used to allow participation by EAC members from distant sites within the VISN, including the VA Kerrville Hospital Division and two outpatient clinics.

Portland VAMC runs unique program to deal with difficult patients.

For the last fifteen years the Portland VAMC has been running an innovative program for managing difficult patients. The goal of the program is to find safe and creative ways to provide care that is consistent with standards of practice to one of the most challenging sub-populations of veterans. This very successful program works to avoid abandoning or "firing" difficult patients who have tried the patience of providers and strained the resources of the system. This is a collaborative process between clinicians and administrators in which the Chief Clinical Executive oversees a 13-member interdisciplinary "Coordinated Care Review Board" that meets monthly. This diverse senior level group includes staff physicians from surgery, emergency medicine, and primary care and representatives from social work, patient advocacy, nursing, and regional counsel. The group takes referrals from any clinician within the medical center who is having trouble with a difficult patient. The primary care physician remains involved in the process, as an important member of the team creating a treatment plan that is designed to meet all the patient's needs. As Shirley Toth, RN, BSN, Director of Coordinated Care for the Portland VAMC, notes, "Providers find that they have a resource to go to. They recognize that the resource is fair, it is comprehensive and it encompasses all of the patient's needs."

This process has been endorsed by the Office of Inspector General, the local congressional office, veterans' service organization officers and the Portland VAMC leadership. Shirley Toth notes that "the support of key leaders and other stakeholders has been essential to the success of the program."

Dealing with difficult and non-compliant patients was the topic of a recent National Center for Ethics Hotline call. Staff with VA Intranet access can see the

transcript summary of that call by going here:
<http://vaww.va.gov/vhaethics/download/EthicsHotlineCall9-26-01.doc>