

FROM THE FIELD

VISN 2 begins to integrate a system-wide philosophy of patient focused and centered care, concentrating on patient education and shared decision making.

Planetree is a health care delivery model created in 1978 by a patient, Angelica Thieriot, after several traumatic hospital experiences. While the technology involved in her treatment was effective, she found the lack of personalized care very disturbing. She developed Planetree philosophy to promote patient focused, patient centered, and holistic care. Planetree strives to involve patients and their families in their care with a strong emphasis on education. Patients are encouraged and taught how to become active participants in their own treatment and health. It encourages a "partnership" between care givers, patients, and their families, rather than a passive provider-patient relationship.

Planetree philosophy was first utilized in VISN 2 by Dr. Emma Aliwalas in 1991. Dr. Aliwalas was then Chief of Rehabilitation Medicine, and introduced this philosophy to her staff at the Albany, NY VAMC. In 1995, however, Rehab became an outpatient program and Planetree was left without a physical home or advocate for several years. Then, in 1999, Network director Frederick Malphurs decided that this health care delivery model needed to be utilized VISN wide as an institutional philosophy for each facility. He selected a budget, made it a line item, and appointed Neal Relyea, RN as the Planetree Coordinator for VISN 2. Mr. Relyea has been given a mandate to bring Planetree Philosophy to the network. He plans to set up a Planetree steering committee in each of the six in-patient facilities and the thirty Community Based Outpatient Clinics, and has several program projects underway. For example, Mr. Relyea is currently collaborating with other staff to create a new and innovative Dementia Life Center at the Batavia, NY VAMC. To learn more about the Planetree model, please visit the VISN 2 Planetree web site at:
<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn02/cslines/planetree.html>.

The Buffalo, NY VAMC Ethics Advisory Committee recently created and implemented a self-assessment pilot project.

The Ethics Advisory Committee (EAC) of the Buffalo, NY VAMC recently ran a satisfaction survey aimed at the members of the EAC itself. The survey consisted of fifty questions distributed at random over the following five themes:

1. Satisfaction with the mechanics of the EAC (e.g., meeting times, distribution of minutes, specific agenda);
2. Satisfaction with the quality and dynamics of EAC discussion (e.g., style of discourse among members, usefulness of discussion, level of interest in topics, allocation of discussion time among topics);

3. Self-perception of individuals in their role as an EAC member (e.g., perception of one's own value to others on the EAC, whether membership is a job requirement);
4. Global Ethical orientation (i.e., tendency to favor one philosophico-ethical position over another);
5. Satisfaction with the EAC.'s effectiveness over the entire organization (e.g., signs of the EAC's impact upon care delivery).

Respondents were asked to rate each question on a scale from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

Benjamin Phillips, PhD, RN, who ran the survey commented that "The limits of this survey are obvious, especially to...seasoned researchers. Nonetheless, as the first attempt in memory to sample EAC members about their work, this exercise has certain intrinsic value. If this project has served only to stimulate thought and provoke interest in further, more sophisticated research, then I believe it enjoys modest success." While this is an early first attempt, Dr. William Nelson, Education Coordinator of the National Center for Ethics notes that it is "...a useful example of committee self assessment, an important process every EAC should implement."

Does your EAC engage in self-assessment? We would like to hear from others who have attempted member satisfaction surveys, or used any other self-assessment tool. Please contact us at: vhaethics@med.va.gov.

