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A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

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This issue of news@vhaethics is focused on ethical issues in human subjects research. These issues are crucial for VHA: as a major Federal sponsor of medical research, we are responsible to thousands of research subjects.

The protection of human research subjects has been a "hot button" issue lately, especially with regard to regulatory and compliance issues. But research ethics involves more than regulatory compliance.

Compliance and ethics differ in that compliance is generally concerned with making sure that conduct conforms to specific rules, especially external legal or regulatory requirements, while ethics is generally concerned with clarifying and promoting ethical practices that may or may not be clearly defined. In VA Central Office, the National Center for Ethics in Health Care works hand-in-hand with the Office of Research and Development (which develops national policy) and the Office of Research Compliance and Assurance (which promotes research conduct in conformance with regulations and policies).

Ethical issues in health care should not be considered in a vacuum, but within a real-world context. To this end, this issue of news@vhaethics provides updates on pertinent regulatory changes, and explores ethical aspects of human subjects research that are not spelled out in law. We hope you find this newsletter useful and, as always, invite your feedback.