VA's Ethics $ÅÐÅÎÄ ÏÎ 9ÏÕ

9ÏÕ can help everyone do the right thing.

As a VA employee, you are entrusted to care for Veterans *"who shall have borne the battle"* and their loved ones. To do this effectively, you need more than your job skills. You also must do what is right. *"Sustainable accountability"* is an ethical practice focusing on individual responsibility that will help you do this. VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald describes sustainable accountability as a *"collaborative endeavor in which employees fulfill their responsibilities to Veterans and to the Department by providing feedback and input on how we can better serve Veterans."* All employees show that ethics is important to them when they provide feedback on how to better serve Veterans. This tip sheet provides some practical suggestions for how to do this every day.

✓ Seek opportunities to say:

"I see ethics as a priority."

"If it's the right thing to do, we'll just have to figure out a way to do it."

"We have an obligation to do the best we can for our patients."

"Everyone deserves to be treated with respect."

"I believe there are competing values here."

"I have an ethical concern about this."

✖ Avoid saying:

"All that really matters is the bottom line."

"What are the chances that anyone will find out?"

"You're naïve — everyone does it."

"Proceed until caught."

"That's my story, and I'm sticking to it."

"I shouldn't be telling you this, but..."

"You didn't hear it from me, but..."

"Don't speak up; they will make up a new rule next week."

Speak up to leaders.

If your leaders give you directions or performance expectations that seem unrealistic, you might feel you need to cut corners or even "game the system" to comply. Instead, you have an obligation to speak up about the problems you may face in trying to meet any specific assignment. Together, you can find a solution to achieve what is best for patients and families. Your leaders should help you do the right thing — in the right way.

Talk about ethics often in meetings.

Here are ideas for how to introduce ethical concerns in your meetings:

- "Now that we know what we can do legally, let's discuss what feels right in service to our Veterans."
- "I think there are some important ethical concerns behind this question."
- "Can we set aside some time to talk about the ethical aspects of this problem?"
- "Should we get advice and assistance from the Ethics Consultation Service?"

You can prove that ethics matters to you by asking:

- "How can we demonstrate respect and consideration for others on this team and the Veterans we serve?"
- "How does our team show professionalism and responsibility at all times?"
- "How can we demonstrate trustworthiness and honesty to ourselves and our Veterans?"

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Ethical Concerns: Where to go for help.

If you face a possible ethical concern, you should first go to your supervisor. However, if you don't get the help you need, or if your supervisor is the source of your concern — and you don't feel safe raising it directly with him or her — you should ask for help elsewhere.

You may have an ethical concern if you...

- Feel caught between competing values
- Have a gut feeling that something isn't right
- Notice that an issue keeps you up at night
- Feel uncomfortable or concerned with how someone is being treated
- See a significant difference of opinion about the right action to take
- See the prospect of a harmful or unfair outcome
- Have an impulse to conceal information from others

Type of Concern	Get Help From
Ethics Quality Gap Systems, processes, or structures are not performing reliably, making it difficult to do the right thing	**Preventive Ethics Team** or other quality improvement function, or the **IE Council** Ph:_____ _____
Government Ethics Legal questions about standards of ethical conduct for employees of the executive branch	**Designated Agency Ethics Official** or **Regional Counsel** Ph: _____ _____
Ethical Concern Uncertainty or conflict about values — the right thing to do is unclear	**IntegratedEthics (IE) Ethics Consultation Service** Ph:_____ _____
Ethics Violation Allegation or evidence of serious risk to patients, administrative misconduct, or noncompliance with legal or regulatory standards	**Compliance & Business Integrity** Ph:_____ _____ **Privacy** Ph: _____ _____ **Research Oversight** Ph:_____ _____ **Information Security** Ph:_____ _____ **Medical Inspector** 1 (800) 634-4782 http://vaww.va.gov/medicalinspector/ **Inspector General** 1 (800) 488-8244 http://www.va.gov/oig/contact/

National Center for ETHICS in Health Care

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