



IntegratedEthics In Action

Promising Practices – Emerging Champions

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Advancing Ethics Consultation Quality:

Focusing on Four Key Elements of the Ethics Consultation Record

NCEHC is rolling out a new ethics consultation quality improvement project that will provide a method of assessing the quality of ethics consultation based on the consultation record. This new tool joins other strategies aimed at improving ethics consultation quality. These include: [CASES](#), a step-by-step approach to ethics consultation quality; [ECWeb](#), a quality improvement tool for ethics consultation; the [Ethics Consultation Proficiency Assessment Tool](#); and the [Ethics Consultation Service Proficiency Assessment Tool](#). *IntegratedEthics® in Action* spoke with Chief of Ethics Evaluation Robert Pearlman, MD, MPH, to find out more about this new project to improve ethics consultations.

IEIA: *Why have you undertaken this ethics consultation quality approach?*

Dr. Pearlman: NCEHC and ethics professionals across the country have introduced process standards to promote ethics consultation quality. We established standards for the skills and knowledge that individual consultants should possess, and set similar expectations for the consult service as a whole. But no one has yet established a way to measure the written product — the consult itself as it is reflected in the consult record. We undertook this process to build a shared understanding in the field around what those quality standards should be and how to evaluate them. Ultimately, if we can assess the quality of the written consult record, we hope to use methods of continuous quality improvement to strengthen this important function in VA.

IEIA: *In the materials you released to the field in April 2015, you focused on assessing four key elements of the ethics consultation record. What are those elements and why focus on them?*

Dr. Pearlman: We developed and tested this approach in an iterative process with internal and external experts in ethics consultation. Through that process, four

key elements were identified as essential to achieve a quality ethics consultation. They are (1) the ethics question, which focuses the consultation response; (2) the consultation-specific information that informs the ethical analysis; (3) the ethical analysis, which provides justification for the conclusions and/or recommendations and; (4) the conclusions and recommendations that promote ethical practice.

IEIA: *How does this help to enhance ethics consultation quality?*

Dr. Pearlman: Eventually, the plan is to have a rating tool and review method to assess the quality of ethics consultation records. For the moment, we are using these key elements to coach and train ethics consultants, to help them understand and adopt these standards in their work. We think such coaching and education will reduce the widely divergent documentation and quality we see today.

IEIA: *Why is it important to create consistency and improve quality?*

Dr. Pearlman: NCEHC wants to ensure ethically appropriate outcomes for all Veterans seeking care in VA. Since 2008, 14,500 ethics consultation records have been documented in ECWeb, and nearly 12,000 — 82 percent — pertained to an active patient case. Often, these are difficult situations involving end-of-life care, or who gets to make decisions on behalf of a patient when they can't. More than 80 percent of the time, the recommendations made in an ethics consultation are followed, indicating that this work has a broad scope and significant impact on patient care. It is important that we get this right.

IEIA: *How can readers find out more about these standards?*

Dr. Pearlman: Information and tools are posted on our intranet site at <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/activities/ecq.asp>.

VA Celebrates Compliance and Ethics Week 2015

National Compliance and Ethics Week (C&E Week) was observed at VA facilities around the country during the week of April 29. Below are some highlights from a great week.



The **Wilmington [DE] VAMC** staged a campus-wide compliance and ethics word search. The winner received a prime parking space for 60 calendar days. C&E Week also included random reviews of “elevator etiquette.” All staff, Veterans, and visitors showing elevator etiquette were presented with an Integrity Award card.

Left, Wilmington IE and CBI Officer Toni Wilson presents Surgical Resident Dave St. Michelle with an Integrity Award for elevator etiquette.

The **West Palm Beach [FL] VAMC** adapted the “Who Wants to Be a Compliance Millionaire” game for its local facility. The CPIO and ethics officer worked with privacy, information security, EEO, regional counsel, labor management and AFGE to include topics from each of these services, which generated stimulating discussions. The games were held during a lunch-and-learn, and also at evening sessions for those staff on off-hour tours. Staff described the events as “fun and educational,” “informative” and “uplifting.”



Right, West Palm Beach C&E Week team. Front Row: Daphnee Desire, privacy assistant; Cynthia Boston-Thompson, HIMS and AFGE representative; Ogochukwu Ekwuabu, regional counsel; Johnetta Kelly, compliance and EEO assistant; and Sandra Walker, assistant chief of human resources. Back Row: Tomas Roman Candelario, human resource specialist; Norman B. Williams, EEO manager; Joseph Fourcade, information security officer; Chaplain Anthony Beazley, ethics officer; Mary Beth Hudak, privacy officer; Haresh Patel, MD, deputy chief of staff; and Paul Aloise, CPIO.

The **Minneapolis [MN] VAHCS** used C&E Week 2015 to facilitate staff meetings, stage presentations on interesting topics and promote compliance and ethics programs and I CARE values. A facility-wide book club featured *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande. Dr. Melissa West and Dr. Kristopher Hartwig led a discussion and overview of the book. A compliance and ethics Jeopardy game was a hit with both staff and Veterans.



Right, simulating the game is Barb Larsen (left), Minneapolis ethics committee member; seated, participants Dr. Melissa West (center) and Compliance and IE Co-chair Patrick Kelly, medical center director (right). Photograph: April Eilers.

The ethics and compliance staff at **James A. Haley Veterans Hospital** (Tampa, FL) held two contests to generate excitement and creative thinking about compliance and ethics. The first, held before the week began, tasked employees with writing an essay or poem about what excellence and integrity meant to them. For the second contest, which took place during the facility’s ethics fair, services competed against each other to produce posters on the topics of organizational integrity, business compliance, or ethics quality in providing the best services and care to Veterans. Winners of both contests were recognized at the ethics fair. Later in the week, all participants in the essay contest were recognized by the facility director.

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Compliance and Ethics Week 2015 Highlights

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The **Syracuse [NY] VAMC** published a series of educational quick tips titled, "Do You Know..." to highlight C&E Week's theme of "Excellence and Integrity." Tips included examples of situations that may present an ethical or compliance concern and the various reporting avenues suitable for responding to the inquiry. Facility leadership reminded staff of the availability of the ethics consultation (EC) service — a multi-disciplinary team to help address health care ethics issues — as well as the existence of the facility's EC hotline.

Left, Syracuse executive leadership promoting the EC service and hotline: Associate Medical Center Director Dr. Judy Hayman, PhD (left) and Medical Center Director James Cody, FACHE. Photo: Susan George, medical media specialist.

The **Wilkes-Barre [PA] VAMC** Compliance and IE committees co-sponsored a table with informational pamphlets, displays, and an ethics/compliance wheel to encourage interactions with staff and Veterans. Depending on the slot that the wheel stopped on, compliance and ethics staff answered questions and provided education to each player. C&E Week culminated with an appreciation day where staff were acknowledged for their continual work in maintaining compliance and an ethical work environment, both of which are vital to VA core values.



Right, (left to right) Linda Zaneski, RN, nurse recruiter, ethics consultant; James Hummel, health system specialist-system redesign, preventive ethics coordinator; Marianne Telincho, lead medical technologist, preventive ethics workgroup member; and Gina Warnagiris, research compliance office, compliance committee member.



The **Greater Los Angeles [CA] VAHCS** produced a multifaceted awareness campaign for this year's C&E Week. About one thousand pieces of informational literature were distributed, raising awareness about the availability of ethics consultation services for both employees and Veterans. Los Angeles PE and EC team members answered questions and offered brochures and information at a display table, speaking with over 250 Veterans and care providers. Compliance and ethics representatives took C&E Week outside the main facility, bringing the "Who Wants to Be a Compliance Millionaire?" game and other presentations to staff at the ambulatory care center and outpatient clinics in the northern Los Angeles area.

(From left to right) A Veteran speaks with Carolyn Conti, PhD (community member), and Elissa Brown, RN (community member), about Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, while Tracey Tajima, DDS (preventive ethics coordinator), and Arthur Culpepper, PhD, FACHE (chief compliance officer/IE program officer) reemphasize the availability of an ethics consultation if the Veteran has further questions about the order.

“Advances in Clinical Ethics”

Ethics symposium for staff of VISN 17

VISN 17 held its annual Ethics Symposium at VA North Texas Health Care system on May 14, 2015, organized by EC Coordinator Padmashri Rastogi, MD, along with PE Coordinator Sherrhonda Gayle. Many ethics consultants volunteered to be part of the symposium. The main focus was to address the issue of psychological safety, an important concern of employees. Dr. Pushpi Chaudhary gave an engaging presentation about ways to achieve balance in providing critique or concern without fear of retaliation. As part of leadership support for the effort, VISN 17 Deputy Network Director Mark Duskocil provided the opening remarks.

Other topics addressed were professionalism in patient care, ethical issues at the end of life, ethics and social media, ethical issues in management of chronic pain, and privacy.

Dr. Giuliano Testa, a well-known liver transplant surgeon and ethicist from Baylor University Medical Center, gave the keynote address on the ethics of organ transplants. The day finished with a Q&A and post-symposium evaluations.

Seventy-nine staff members attended the symposium in person, 45 attended via VTEL from South Texas, and there was also good attendance in Central Texas. Staff feedback from the symposium was positive, with participants calling it “very successful” and “informative and . . . nicely presented.”

VISN and facility leaders were pleased with the presentations and attendance, as well as the IntegratedEthics work performed during ethics and compliance week.

Ethics Symposium for Veterans

Five years ago, at North Texas HCS, Dr. Padmashri Rastogi founded a symposium for Veterans during Compliance and Ethics week. This year’s half-day symposium focused on enhancing Veteran-centered care. Three panels of experts addressed questions regarding improving communication, hassle-free chronic pain care and end-of-life issues.

The Veterans Symposium is a venue to provide information specific to Veterans, listen to their ethical concerns and give them clarification about the dilemmas they face. Dr. Rastogi described it as “an effort to reach out to our Veterans and let them know that we care.” Ethics consultation brochures were available containing the how, why, who and when of ethics consultation.

During the symposium, the panelists answered 38 written questions as well as fielding in-person questions from over 200 participants. “The overwhelming response and involvement of Veterans in this format compels us to continue this format next year as well,” said Dr. Rastogi.

Ethics Symposium for Veterans

Dallas VA Medical Center
4500 S. Lancaster Rd. Dallas 75216
Thursday, April 30, 2015 at 8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Atrium
Our common goal is a healthy life
Burdens of decisions: Are we sharing?
Compassion | Privacy | Confidentiality
Dignity | Respect
Time and understanding: Are we giving enough?
Earning Your Trust Through Conversation
Open to Veterans, their families and friends, VA employees
Refreshments and coffee will be served

Dr. Cynthia Geppert Wins 2014 William A. Nelson Award for Excellence in Health Care Ethics

Dr. Cynthia Geppert, chief, consultation-liaison psychiatry and chief, ethics consultation at the New Mexico VA Health Care System, was awarded the 2014 William A. Nelson Award for Health Care Ethics. Andrew Welch, medical center director, New Mexico VAHCS and Dr. James Goff, acting chief of staff, presented the award on March 25.

Veterans we serve,” said Mr. Welch. “Your career demonstrates an untiring dedication to ethics in health care.” Dr. Goff added, “This is a sentinel career achievement for Cindy. There is no higher honor one can receive than this award in VHA for health care ethics.”

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“You truly have made a difference in the field of health care ethics — and through your work, in the lives of the

Dr. Cynthia Geppert Wins 2014 William A. Nelson Award

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"We are very proud of her achievements and contributions," said Dr. Goff.

Since joining the New Mexico VAHCS in 2003, Dr. Geppert has been a tireless champion of ethics at her facility and throughout VISN 18, successfully developing and implementing many new ethics activities and programs. She promoted ethics as chief ethics consultant, facility IntegratedEthics program officer, chair of the VISN 18 Ethics Consultation Operational Team, and recently, acting chief of ethics consultation for VA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care. She is an academically- and fellowship-trained ethicist who holds a doctoral degree in clinical ethics consultation. She is also an author, teacher and researcher in the fields of medical ethics, addiction and pain management. Dr. Geppert has received many professional awards, including the Secretary's "Hands and Heart Award" for "providing exceptional, compassionate, sustained care to America's Veterans."

"Winning the Nelson award is an incredible honor," noted Dr. Geppert. "The VA is truly the greatest place in the world to be a clinical ethicist, and I am grateful for the exceptional training and opportunities the VA has given me as an ethics consultant."

The annual Nelson Award was established in 2005 to recognize VHA employees whose careers exhibit the highest standards of excellence, dedication and accomplishment in the field of health care ethics. The award honors Chaplain William A. Nelson, MDiv, PhD, who worked for 30 years to promote ethical health care practice throughout VHA.

For further information, visit <http://www.ethics.va.gov/activities/Nelson.asp>, or contact Steven Spickler at 202-461-4102 or steven.spickler@va.gov.



Dr. Geppert (center) receives the 2014 Nelson Award from Andrew Welch (left), medical center director, New Mexico VAHCS, and Dr. James Goff (right), acting chief of staff.

Around IntegratedEthics . . .

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ISSUES Pocket Card Updated

The 2015 update of the ISSUES pocket card is now available. This card describes the ISSUES approach — a practical, systematic process for addressing ethics quality gaps that arise in health care institutions.

The card can be downloaded from http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/integratedethics/issues_pocket_card_final_20150602.pdf or http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/ETHICS/docs/integratedethics/issues_pocket_card_final_20150602.pdf.

National Center for
ETHICS
in Health Care

Developed by the IntegratedEthics team at the National Center for Ethics in Health Care, *IntegratedEthics in Action* is published on the IE website vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEAction.asp, listserv, and via other IE venues. Its purpose is to rapidly disseminate promising practices and feature emerging IE champions to help facilities and VISNs in implementing IE. We welcome your comments and suggestions for topics to vhaethics@va.gov.

Servant Leadership Development Guide includes IE Ethical Leadership Materials

The National Center for Organization Development has updated the VA Servant Leadership Development Guide for 2015. Included in Pillar #1, Person of Character, and Pillar #7, Moral Authority, are links to IE Ethical Leadership tools, which enhance the connections between VA Servant Leadership training and IntegratedEthics tools. The guide is available at <http://organizationalhealth.vssc.med.va.gov/Pages/Servant-Leadership.aspx>.

IntegratedEthics
Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care