

True North

Newsletter of the VA National Center for Ethics in Health Care

Issue 1, November/December 2016



Letter from the Director



Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of our National Center for Ethics in Health Care newsletter, *True North*. We chose the title *True North* because it reflects the reality that achieving our goals is often complex, involves multiple paths, and is fraught with uncertainty. If, however, we are focused on our true north, the health and well-being of our Veterans, it will ground our work and ensure that we will be able to follow the right path.

Since joining NCEHC a little over a year ago, I have been extremely impressed with the professionalism and dedication of VA employees, both within our program office and throughout our organization. I have had the privilege of spending time in the field through participation in IntegratedEthics® learning tours, meeting VISN IE points of contact, and simply talking with employees and Veterans. These encounters have helped inform my thinking about our Center's role and the critical importance of health care ethics in VA.

It has become clear to me that too many of us are inhibited in our job performance by fear and the sense that we are not empowered to raise issues or ask questions. As we try to meet short-term performance goals, it may be difficult to keep our eye on the long-term health of our organization. We have an opportunity to focus our efforts on creating a positive culture, where our passion for serving Veterans is the guiding force of our actions.

Fortunately, we have the means to change VA culture — and NCEHC can be an engine for that change. Addressing VA culture must be our number one priority during fiscal year 2017. Our aim is to infuse VA with a strong ethical culture by supporting facility leadership, our IE program staff, and partnering with program offices that share this goal. I would like to see us work to transform our I CARE

values into living values for all levels of staff. Of course, with IE presence at every VA health care facility, we have a ready means to spread culture change rapidly and effectively. To this end, we are undertaking a major NCEHC initiative on moral distress to identify, measure, and address causes of moral distress across all facilities.

Another priority for FY17 is to strengthen our ethics education program through tailored educational materials, a comprehensive ethics curriculum, and mentorship. Our Ethics and Professionalism Grand Rounds series is part of this strategy — as is this newsletter.

Our third big priority is to ensure the transformative impact of our work through a rigorous program of evaluation and assessment to inform ethical health care practice. IntegratedEthics, our ethics educational activities, our Life Sustaining Treatment Decisions initiative, our Ethics Fellowship Program — all can be made more effective through a process of assessment and continuous improvement.



Unmasking War Exhibit at VA Central Office with (left to right) Navy Veteran Rusty Noesner, Art Therapist Melissa Walker, Associate Director for the Center of Women Veterans Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, and NCEHC Executive Director Lisa Lehmann

To all of my colleagues in NCEHC and VA: thank you for continuing to support health care ethics and the work of our Center. Together, we can change the ethical culture of VA for the good of our Veterans.

—Lisa Lehmann, MD, PhD



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
National Center for Ethics in Health Care

Dr. Molly Osborne Recognized with the 2015 William A. Nelson Award for Excellence in Health Care Ethics

Molly Osborne, MD, PhD, is the 2015 recipient of the William A. Nelson Award.



Dr. Molly Osborne receives the 2015 Nelson Award from VA Portland Health Care System Director Michael W. Fisher.

Dr. Osborne has an outstanding record as a leader in integrating ethics in health care. She was selected as the IntegratedEthics Program Officer (IEPO) at the VA Portland Health Care System (VAPORHCS) in 2008. In her role as an attending physician in pulmonology and critical care medicine, and through partnerships with the Oregon Health & Science University, Dr. Osborne has demonstrated unparalleled commitment to serving Veterans and exceptional focus on organizational excellence in health care ethics. Her knowledge and experience using ethical principles to advocate for Veterans enhances her ability to achieve remarkable results while sustaining an atmosphere of innovation and excellence.

“This is truly an honor, and reflects the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey results ranking of VAPORHCS in the top five percent of VHA facilities in measures of ethical leadership.”
— Dr. Molly Osborne

Throughout her career, Dr. Osborne has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to education and scholarship. She has contributed to or edited 58 publications, 61 abstracts, 28 grant awards, and nine book chapters and internet publications to promote ethical health care. At the national level, Dr. Osborne works with the American Thoracic Society Task Force on Palliative Care.

As the previous Chair of the Association of American Medical Colleges Group on Student Affairs, Dr. Osborne has worked to ensure the continuous development of future clinicians and leaders. Other awards and recognition of note include an AAMC GSA Exemplary Service Award (2013), Best Doctor’s Award (2001- present), and recognition for work on the VISN 20 IntegratedEthics Council (2009).

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 about the Nelson Award and how to nominate a colleague for this award, visit [the award website](#).

ASBH Awards Dr. Robert A. Pearlman for Distinguished Service

NCEHC Ethics Evaluation Chief Robert A. Pearlman, MD, MPH, received the 2016 Award for Distinguished Service from the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH). Dr. Pearlman was presented with the award for his work using the Ethics Consultation Quality Assessment Tool, which rates the quality of ethics case consultations based on the written record, in the ASBH quality attestation pilot process. The ultimate goal of the attestation process is the development of a means to assess the quality of a clinical ethics written consult and help identify qualified consultants.



Dr. Robert A. Pearlman

“I was particularly pleased about receiving this recognition because the work provided important benefits to VA by further developing the Ethics Consultation Quality Assessment Tool, as well as to the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities by assisting the pilot attestation process.”
—Dr. Robert Pearlman

Introducing the Learning Resources Catalog

If you've ever spent too much time online searching for that ethics tool, pocket card or podcast, [the Learning Resources Catalog \(LRC\)](#) is here to help. The LRC is a searchable collection of ethics learning materials from NCEHC. You can filter courses, trainings and other materials by audience, duration, topic, ethical domain, product type and more. It's a great way to find tools for training and for improving your own ethical practice.



Beth Doyle, NCEHC Education Specialist, demonstrates the search function of the Learning Resources Catalog for locating ethics materials.

To get you started, here are just two of many available resources. Download one or both!

[How to Follow Up on Ethical Concerns \(handout\)](#)

This 30-minute group discussion activity helps leaders understand the importance of following up on ethical concerns and provides an opportunity to practice what to say to staff when an ethical concern is brought forward to leadership. ([Facilitator guide](#) and [slides](#))

[Servant Leadership: Intersections with Ethics, Business Integrity & Compliance](#)

Dr. Maureen Cash, VHA National Center for Organization Development, speaks about intersections between ethical leadership principles and servant leadership. (Part of the [Sound Ethics in Health Care podcast series](#)).

Virtual Quality Improvement Meeting Spreads Best Practices:

VHA Facilities Share Successful Initiatives

This year's virtual quality improvement meeting shared VHA facility best practices on ethics quality improvement around the country. Moderator Rod Dismukes, PhD, chair

of ethics consultation at VA Boston Health Care System (HCS) said, "We had a great Virtual Quality Improvement Meeting this year. We had many thoughtful posters submitted for consideration and the review panel worked very hard on the selection process. We eventually decided on the four ethical leadership projects presented during the meeting, from Central Texas VA HCS, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, Indianapolis VA Medical Center (VAMC), and Minneapolis VA HCS.

"The speakers did a fantastic job presenting their work in the meeting and you could tell from the follow up questions that they generated some excitement and great ideas from the meeting participants."

Central Texas, realizing that Integrated Ethics Staff Survey (IESS) results alone could not give the facility enough information about what management accountability *means* to the facility staff, presented on focus groups held with management and staff (separately), to develop an observable and actionable understanding of accountability. Central Texas's objectives included expanding on the issues reported in IESS data, providing a forum for in-person feedback, and gaining perspective and hopefully common ground from both managers and staff.

Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital built a robust improvement opportunity, relying on All Employee Survey results, labor relations findings and town hall feedback. All the information pointed to a need to address psychological safety at multiple levels. Hines' approach to improving psychological safety is multi-faceted and long-term (through Q4 2017). Their IE Program Officer (IEPO) presented lessons learned from the Phoenix VA scandal to Pentad, IE Council and Director's staff meeting; partnered with NCOD for a multi-stage Just Culture¹ educational plan; and formed an Ethics Action Group made up of facility employees at all levels to promote education and skills training.

The Indianapolis VAMC presented a project to get more managers to talk about ethics during staff meetings. To support managers, the Indianapolis IEPO sent a facilitation guide and monthly ethical scenarios to managers for use during staff meetings.

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¹ See [VA National Center for Patient Safety for more on Just Culture](#).

Virtual Quality Improvement Meeting Spreads Best Practices

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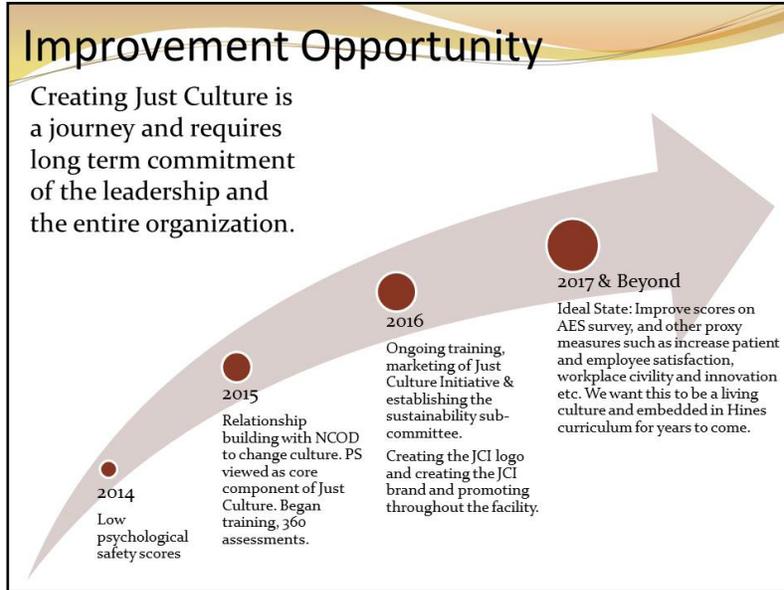
Indianapolis also included a robust measurement of the program's impact, surveying managers, gathering anecdotal accounts, checking meeting minutes, and looking at the numbers for formal and informal requests for ethics consults. To follow up, Indianapolis will add a performance element to service and section chief performance plans including language both on discussing ethics during staff meetings and resolving ethical issues in their areas.

Minneapolis VA HCS presented their annual facility-wide book club focused on ethics-related topics. Books are chosen based on trends in recent completed ethics consultations, with the goal to close a gap in staff understanding of general ethics concepts in health care. Compliance and ethics staff lead discussions on the book's message, and how health care providers may perceive, interpret and understand that message. Follow-up surveys tracked participation (both in reading the books and attending the later presentations) revealing that employees found

presentations valuable even if they had not read the books.

The virtual quality meeting is part of a larger VA push to identify and spread promising practices. The VA Diffusion of Excellence Initiative, a national initiative of Under Secretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin, is an effort to identify clinical and administrative best practices, and disseminate them to other sites of care.

Get engaged at your local facility to use this model for your successful IE and preventive ethics projects. The model starts with VISN leaders hosting events to identify practices for local dissemination and national consideration. Thirteen Gold Status practices were selected in February 2016 and VHA employees have engaged with over 260 replication projects, across 70 facilities.



Hines VA Hospital presents their long-term plans for improving psychological safety.

Robin Cook, IE Manager, Preventive Ethics, noted, "After years of struggling to spread improvements beyond the facility level, we now have a way to have projects reviewed for potential adoption through the local network and beyond." So get those projects submitted at the local level for possible selection to be submitted to the Diffusion of Excellence Initiative!

An Interview with Voices of Integrity Producer Steve Tokar

True North spoke this month with Writer-Editor Steve Tokar, who produces *Voices of Integrity* (VOI), a series of personal stories from VA employees about what integrity means to them as they serve Veterans. *Voices of Integrity* can be found on [the VOI series page](#) on the NCEHC website.

What is the goal behind the series?

The goal is to give VA employees a chance to tell in their own words — literally in their own voices — what integrity means to them as they serve Veterans.

voices)))
of integrity

How do you think that the series will benefit Veterans, employees and other stakeholders?

Anyone who clicks on a VOI segment can hear for themselves the sincerity, pride and passion that VA employees bring to their jobs every day. After listening to a few of these, it's easy to understand why Veterans give VA such high marks. Without drawing any special attention to it, these employees practice ethical leadership every day as a matter of course.

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An Interview with Steve Tokar

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What topics or issues have been explored to date in the series?

To name just a few: what it means to provide health care to rural Veterans who come from far away for cancer treatment; how a VA pharmacist ensures that Veterans get the right medications; the meaning of the word “excellence” in VHA; and the experience of running a VA national cemetery.

Is there a special moment from one of the episodes you’d like to share?

Two come to mind. A VBA benefits specialist telling me that, as a Veteran, he treats each and every claim he reviews as if it were his own; and a National Cemetery director stating very simply that his and his staff’s responsibility to the Veteran and the Veteran’s family goes on for eternity.

What are some ways that facilities, IEPOs and others could use the series to promote Integrity throughout the year?

For employees, they can be played at staff meetings and other gatherings, and also during employee orientation. IE teams might use a VOI segment to spark a discussion on integrity, excellence or a related I CARE value. And leaders could use VOI as an inspirational tool in a message to employees.

Specifically, how do you suggest facilities think about using these during Compliance and Ethics Week?

Early and often! To kick off or wrap up C&E Week events; to play for people at C&E Week information tables; to send as links to everyone in the facility or VISN; to serve as an adjunct to an ethical leadership exercise; the possibilities are rich and varied.

Around the Center . . .

Ethics and Professionalism Grand Rounds, December 8

On Thursday, December 8, from noon to 1 p.m. ET, the VHA National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC) will present the next Ethics and Professionalism Grand Rounds webinar. The topic will be moral distress — what it is, why it is a concern for many people in the health care field, and how we can measure it and begin to address it. This will be the first of a three-part series on confronting moral distress — the next two sessions will focus on moral courage and moral resilience.

[Register Now! Ethics and Professionalism, Moral Distress: What Is Moral Distress?](#)

Speaker: Ann Hamric, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Former Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Programs, School of Nursing, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Date and Time: December 8, 2016, 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm ET

Location: [Webcast](#)

Audience: Nurses, physicians, social workers, chaplains, and mental health professionals.

Accreditations: ACCME, ANCC, APA, ACCME-NP, ASWB, NYSED.

What We’re Reading:

Ann Hamric, upcoming speaker for our Ethics and Professionalism Grand Rounds series, reviews empirical research on moral distress, why it’s so challenging, and what we can do to advance the field. (Hamric, Ann B. [“Empirical Research on Moral Distress: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities.”](#) HEC Forum 24.1 (2012): 39-49. Web.)

Ann Hamric and Lucia Wocial describe how to create moral spaces and expand ethics resources to improve ethical culture. (Hamric, Ann B., and Lucia D. Wocial. [“Institutional Ethics Resources: Creating Moral Spaces.”](#) Hastings Center Report (September-October 2016): 22-27. Web.)

Vicki Lachman, leading scholar in moral distress, courage, and resilience, reviews all three concepts, provides

examples, and describes how to cultivate moral resilience to manage and prevent moral distress. (Lachman, Vicki D. [“Moral Resilience: Managing and Preventing Moral Distress and Moral Residue.”](#) Medsurg Nursing: Ethics, Law, and Policy 25.2 (2016): 121-124. Web.)

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This newsletter is produced by the staff at the National Center for Ethics in Health Care.

Archived issues of the *IE in Action* newsletter are available at NCEHC’s [IE in Action page](#).