



IntegratedEthics In Action

Issue 23

Promising Practices — Emerging Champions

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Special Issue of Research Journal Features IntegratedEthics

Six Papers Analyze VA's Efforts to Evaluate and Improve Ethics Quality

The innovative work of VA's IntegratedEthics (IE) initiative is highlighted in volume 4, issue 1, of *AJOB Primary Research*, released in February 2013. *AJOB Primary Research* is published by the American Society for Bioethics and Health and is a spinoff of the *American Journal of Bioethics* that was originally launched in 2010.

The new issue, titled "Ethics Quality in the VA Health Care System," features six peer-reviewed papers solicited by the journal and written by staff members of the National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC). The papers describe VA's experiences evaluating ethics quality in the VA health care system as part of IE's com-

prehensive model for managing ethics in health care organizations.

"VA's dedication to the highest ethical standards helps us deliver better care," said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert A. Petzel. "IntegratedEthics is a leading example of VA's data-driven approach to health care quality."

"It can be a challenge to evaluate ethics quality in health care," said Dr. Ellen Fox, VA's Chief Ethics in Health Care Officer. "These articles show that ethical practices and culture can be measured and managed just like every other dimension of health care quality."

In the issue's lead article, commentators Bette-Jane Crigger, Director of Ethics Policy for the American Medical Association, and Matthew Wynia, Director of the AMA's Institute for Ethics, describe the papers as a "remarkable and helpful body of work," which, they predict, will be "influential well beyond the VA system."

The NCEHC thanks all whose hard work contributed to the development of these papers. This includes anyone who took the IESS, managed the publicity or distribution of the IESS or the IEFW in their facility, provided testing or commentary on any version of the tools, or contributed experi-

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VHA to Participate in National Healthcare Decisions Day April 16

NCEHC is excited to announce that VHA will again be participating in National Healthcare Decisions Day (NHDD) on April 16, 2013. This sixth annual event is a collaboration of national, state, and community organizations. These organizations engage in a variety of planning, marketing, and media activities. NHDD is intended to inspire and educate the public and providers about the importance of advance care planning, and to empower patients to be involved in decisions about their future health care.

Last year, many VA facilities held activities during NHDD, and NCEHC encourages all VA facilities to do so this year. NCEHC is offering numerous materials to assist with planning, which are posted on the NCEHC website: <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov>. The website includes links to VHA's policy on advance care planning, new training materials on advance care planning for VHA practitioners, sample VHA activities from last year's NHDD, and other tools to support advance care planning conversations with Veterans. (See list of additional NCEHC resources at the end of this article.)

NHDD provides a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with other health care organizations to help interested patients and their loved ones make important decisions about advance care planning. As a part of VHA's commitment to patient-centered care,

advance care planning ensures that Veterans' care preferences are known even after they lose the ability to make decisions for themselves. The NCEHC encourages IntegratedEthics team members to support the effort to educate patients about advance care planning and advance directives leading up to April 16.

Registration for NHDD is free and available at <http://www.nhdd.org/join/>. Materials and ideas for events and activities are posted at <http://www.nhdd.org/tools/>. For additional information or questions, contact: nhdd@nhpco.org.

Additional Information About Advance Directives:

New training program for VHA staff on advance directives: <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/Policy/ADTraining.asp>

VHA Handbook 1004.02, Advance Care Planning and Management of Advance Directives: http://vaww1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2042.

Patient education documents: "Your Rights Regarding Advance Directives": (<http://vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-0137A-fill.pdf>) and "What You Should Know About Advance Directives": (<http://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-0137B-fill.pdf>).

Academy-Trained Improvement Advisors Can Provide Valuable Resource for PE Teams

Systems Redesign (SR) is all about improvement in the way our system works. Since “quality is a systems property,” the level of performance of the system is pretty important to our precious customers! To increase the availability of improvement professionals, SR offers training to develop Improvement Advisors through an Improvement Advisor Academy (IAA). The NCEHC has sponsored members of the IE community to attend this 12-month training; these participants, along with other advisors, are a valuable resource for assisting teams in effectively conducting improvement projects, including those that address ethical practices in health care. PE teams, for example, can reach out to these leaders and facilitators for guidance on using advanced SR theory and methods to address systemic ethics quality gaps.

Lori E. Stenseng, Performance Improvement Coordinator for the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) at the Captain James A. Lovell Health Care Center (North Chicago), and Sharon A. Dumlao, RN, Preventive Ethics Coordinator (PEC) at VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System, were among those sponsored by the NCEHC to attend the IAA.

Before entering the Academy, Ms. Stenseng and Ms. Dumlao had a passionate interest in ethics and were serving as PECs at their facilities. While gaining valuable ethics knowledge in these roles, they both believed that they — and the PE function at their respective facilities — would benefit if they received more in-depth training on applying quality improvement (QI) principles and tools.

“With zero QI experience,” Ms. Stenseng explained, “The IAA was the only program I

found (inside and outside of VHA) that promised to take the participant from improvement novice to expert in 12 months. This was just what I needed.”

Ms. Dumlao added, “Although I loved improvement work, I didn’t know all the tools to use. The Academy presented a great opportunity to gather those tools and apply them to ethics improvement work.” She gained further understanding of how both PE and SR processes could be applied to a single project after attending the August 2011 PE Beyond the Basics workshop.

Since returning from the Academy, Ms. Dumlao has discovered that leadership relies on her more to guide improvement activities across the facility.

Both also lauded the quality of the instruction and group practice projects. “At the Academy, I learned the language of change, and I learned how to facilitate change,” said Ms. Stenseng. “This means choosing the correct process and empowering stakeholders so that I can guide my peers through unfamiliar and often frightening territories to successful outcomes.”

Ms. Dumlao concurs. “The knowledge gained was priceless. Learning the similarities between ISSUES and vision, analysis, team, aim, map, measure, change, sustain, and spread (VA TAMMCS) cycles was the greatest benefit. Also, having the opportu-

nity to build relationships with other Improvement Advisors throughout VHA has been very beneficial.”

Since returning from the Academy, Ms. Dumlao has discovered that leadership relies on her more to guide improvement activities across the facility. In addition to speaking at staff meetings and town halls, she teaches students involved in the Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, and Development training program and writes monthly articles. She has also started an electronic quality room to showcase improvement projects from all the services. Further, she can now more readily identify potential topics for ISSUES cycles. “I can ask the right questions to determine if there is an ethics quality gap,” she said.

During the Academy, Ms. Stenseng transitioned to her facility’s Primary Care Clinic where she joined the recently implemented PACT. Owing to her Academy training, Ms. Stenseng manages Primary Care Performance Improvement programs, and routinely works with staff on stakeholder-identified improvement projects.

Ms. Dumlao believes that the ethics component is inherent in SR and, looking down the road, hopes to make it more explicit. “It is my wish to show that component so that the teams will realize they are also improving things from an ethical standpoint,” she said.

To locate trained Improvement Advisors in your facility or VISN, contact a member of your local SR program. For more information about the Academy, please contact NCEHC’s PE Advisor Robin Cook at Robin.Cook@va.gov.

AJOB Papers

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ence and knowledge to the conceptualization, creation, formation, revision, and redesign of the tools or their supporting materials. It is because of these efforts that VA is at the forefront of promoting and achieving high quality ethics in health care.

The papers are:

The IntegratedEthics™ Staff Survey: A Tool to Evaluate and Improve Ethical Practices in Health Care, which describes the development of the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey (IESS), an assessment tool that provides a broad snapshot of staff perceptions of ethical practices in the VA health care system.

Perceptions of Clinical Ethics Practices: IntegratedEthics Staff Survey Data from

the VA Health Care System, which examines clinicians’ perceptions of ethical practices in the VA health care system as measured by the IESS.

Perceptions of Research Ethics Practices: IntegratedEthics Staff Survey Data from the VA Health Care System, which assesses researchers’ perceptions of ethical practices in the VA health care system as measured by the IESS.

Perceptions of Ethical Leadership and the Ethical Environment and Culture: IntegratedEthics Staff Survey Data from the VA Health Care System, which examines VA employees’ perceptions of ethical leadership and the ethical environment and culture in the VA health care system as measured by the IESS.

The IntegratedEthics Facility Workbook: An Evaluation Tool to Support Health Care Ethics Program Implementation and Quality Management, which describes VA’s four-

year experience with the IntegratedEthics Facility Workbook (IEFW), a tool that evaluates facility ethics programs against IE’s standards for ethics quality.

Evaluating Ethics Quality in Health Care Organizations: Looking Back and Looking Forward, in which Dr. Fox looks back on what the VHA approach has revealed so far about evaluating ethics quality, and proposes an agenda for future work.

The papers are available at <http://www.ethics.va.gov/EthicsQualityinVA.asp>.

The IE assessment tools, including the IESS and the IEFW, are on the IntegratedEthics website: <http://www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/ieresources.asp>

Promoting Health Equity Across VHA

VA Calls on Facilities to “Build a Welcoming and Inclusive Environment” for LGBT Veterans

In recognition of the ethical imperative to achieve equity in health care delivery, VHA has launched several new initiatives to advance the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Veterans. This important ethics issue aligns with a major goal in the VHA Strategic Plan: to provide proactive, patient-driven health care to all Veterans.

In December 2012, a joint memorandum on LGBT inclusion was sent to VISN and Facility Directors by the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management. That memorandum provided information on the new VHA Office of Health Equity (OHE/10A6) and summarized the recommendations of the interim LGBT Health Equity Workgroup.

The NCEHC joined other VHA offices on the Workgroup to develop and implement the recommendations. Those recommendations include updating VHA’s patient rights documents (see sidebar) and reissuance of VHA Directive 2013-003, Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans. An important addition to this Directive is an appendix that answers many of the questions asked by the field about the care and management of transgender and intersex Veterans.

The Workgroup considered facility action critical because “the health care environment experienced by Veterans is locally created.” Accordingly, OHE is directing facilities to undertake at least three specific initiatives in Fiscal Year 2013 to “help build a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT Veterans within their facility.” As noted in the December memorandum, facilities can choose initiatives focused on policy, education, research, cultural competency, special emphasis programs, or outreach. To plan and execute these activities, facilities are encouraged to form local workgroups, subcommittees, action teams, and the like; to elicit the support of OHE; and to consult VA and non-VA resources, including the Healthcare Equality Index and the Joint Commission’s Field Guide on providing health care for the LGBT community. (See the resource list at the end of this article.)

“IntegratedEthics teams should be engaged with these efforts,” suggests Sherrie Hans, PhD, Deputy Chief Ethics in Health Care Officer, and member of the Workgroup. “IE staff can serve on the workgroups or can advise them through

informal meetings or formal invitations to review their plans at an IE Council meeting.”

The OHE is responsible for advancing health equity and health care equality for all Veterans and can provide assistance on the LGBT equity initiatives. For more information, contact Carlos J. Rodriguez, OHE Program Manager, at Carlos.Rodriguez5@va.gov.

Resource List

Human Rights Campaign. Healthcare Equality Index. The public site is available at: <http://www.hrc.org/hej>

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VA Releases Updated “Rights and Responsibilities” Statements for Patients and Families

As part of the VHA-wide health equity initiative, the NCEHC recently coordinated the revision of two documents that describe the basic rights and responsibilities of patients, residents, and loved ones. “Rights and Responsibilities of VA Patients and Residents of Community Living Centers” and “Rights and Responsibilities of Family Members of VA Patients and Residents of Community Living Centers” were approved by the Under Secretary for Health in January 2013. These documents broaden VHA’s statement of non-discrimination to explicitly include “sexual orientation” and “gender identity or expression,” and to provide a more inclusive definition of “family.” This language signals VA’s commitment to respect for all of its patients and conforms to Joint Commission standards for non-discrimination and inclusion.

“The revision of these rights documents is a tangible example of VHA’s commitment to personalized, equitable care that ensures that our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Veterans experience an open and supportive care environment,” said Sherrie Hans, PhD, Deputy Chief Ethics in Health Care Officer, and member of the workgroup that developed recommendations for the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health to promote health equity. (See accompanying article.)

One of the initiatives of the newly established Office of Health Equity (OHE) is to encourage facilities to participate in the Healthcare Equality Index (HEI). The HEI is a quality improvement tool administered by the Human Rights Campaign that benchmarks best practice and policy for equal treatment of LGBT patients and families. The rights and responsibilities documents, with their updated definitions, can be used to meet two of the “Core Four” Criteria in the HEI relating to non-discrimination and equal visitation. Facilities must meet all four criteria to receive Leader status recognition from HEI. The OHE has asked VHA facilities to complete

the self-reporting HEI survey by April 1, 2013. Facilities can register at: http://www.vha.vaco.portal.va.gov/sites/OHE/CCC/Shared%20Documents/OHE%20Survey%20Request%20Form_distributed.pdf

The complete revised non-discrimination statement is:

“You will be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect as an individual. Consistent with Federal law, VA policy, and accreditation standards of The Joint Commission, you will not be subject to discrimination for any reason, including for reasons of age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.”

The inclusive definition of “family” is:

“When a loved one is involved in support and care of a VA patient or Community Living Center (CLC) resident, VA considers a patient or CLC resident’s *family* to include anyone related to the patient or CLC resident in any way (for example, biologically or legally) and anyone whom the patient or CLC resident considers to be family.”

The Office of Patient-Centered Care & Cultural Transformation is working with the Office of Forms and Publications to print and distribute the patient and family member rights documents for posting at facilities.

Before the printed material is available, these documents can be posted to local listservs and websites. They are available at: http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Pt_CLC_Rights_and_Responsibilities_20130207.pdf

(Patients and Community Living Center Residents)

and: http://www.ethics.va.gov/docs/policy/Family_Rights_and_Responsibilities_20130207.pdf (Family Members).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

IntegratedEthics Program Meets OIG's Compliance Threshold

In Fiscal Year 2012, VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted Combined Assessment Program (CAP) Reviews of IntegratedEthics (IE) programs at 54 facilities to determine the extent of their compliance with IE policy. Positive results of the Reviews were officially presented to VA leadership in February. Because of this favorable outcome, the OIG determined that, overall, the IE program is being implemented according to policy and, accordingly, will make no recommendations to NCEHC for improvement.

The review used the standard CAP Review threshold of 95% compliance with the requirements of policy, in this case VHA Handbook 1004.06, IntegratedEthics. Nearly all examined items exceeded this threshold.

For example, all 54 reviewed facilities had instituted an appropriate local policy that included ethics consultation, preventive ethics, and ethical leadership, and had completed the IE Facility Workbook (IEFW). Forty-eight facilities had used the IEFW to identify weaknesses in their program, and 47 had created an action plan to address the findings.

Ethics consultation

During the review year, all 54 sites had designated a person to complete ethics consultations, performed at least one ethics consultation during the year, and had entered at least one consultation into ECWeb. In addition:

- 51 sites were meeting the required consult volume.
- 47 sites had appropriately documented the consults in the patient record in addition to documenting them on ECWeb.

Preventive ethics

The CAP reviews identified variability in the quality and scope of the reviewed ISSUES cycles. Overall findings included:

- 50 of the 54 reviewed sites had completed the required two ISSUES cycles.
- Of the sites that completed two cycles, only five failed to sustain the improvement with follow-up monitoring and activities.

IE staff members are providing assistance to each facility where deficiencies were identified and are sharing summary results with VISN IE Points of Contact. For further information, contact Melissa Bottrell, PhD, Chief, IntegratedEthics, at Melissa.Bottrell@va.gov or (510) 525-0979.

Health Equity Initiative

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The internal site for VHA facilities is available at: <http://vaww.vha.vaco.portal.va.gov/sites/OHE/CCC/Shared%20Documents/HEI.aspx>

The Joint Commission. *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide*. Oakbrook Terrace, IL; 2011. Available at: <http://www.jointcommission.org/lgbt>

VA Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). Available at: <http://www.diversity.va.gov/>

VA Transgender Education Resources SharePoint. Available at: <http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/pcsclipro/trer/default.aspx>

VHA Directive 2013-003: Providing Health Care for Transgender and Intersex Veterans. Available at: http://vaww1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2863

VHA Office of Health Equity (OHE). Available at: <http://vaww.pdush.med.va.gov/programs/ohe/oheDefault.aspx>

Compliance and Ethics Week
April 29- May 3, 2013



National Compliance and Ethics Week (CEW), the annual special communications event promoted by the NCEHC and the Office of Compliance and Business Integrity (CBI), is scheduled for April 29-May 3, 2013. The overarching mission of CEW is to enhance support for values-based practices and business compliance in VHA. In recognition of this mission, CEW has been supported in previous years by the Office of Quality, Safety and Value and the Office of the Under Secretary for Health. This year's theme is "Excellence Through Integrity."

NCEHC plans to provide staff with a variety of developed activities to use at their facilities during CEW. They will be made available on the IntegratedEthics (IE) intranet site (<http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/index.asp>) and the Compliance and Ethics Week site (<http://vaww.cbi.va.gov/ceweek.asp>).

As we did last year, the NCEHC would like to highlight local CEW activities in *IE in Action*. If you are interested in having your IE team's activities considered for inclusion in an upcoming issue, please collect photos, quotes, stories, and the like during the week and e-mail them to beth.ritter@va.gov. An IE listserv message will also be sent requesting this information as we get closer to CEW. To register for the IE listserv go to: <http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/apps/IEStaffing/index.cfm>

Montefiore Medical Center and Albert Einstein College of Medicine present:

4 Day Intensive Course in Bioethics Consultation Skills

May 13-14, June 3-4, 2013

Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, NY

For more information and to enroll, visit: <http://www.einstein.yu.edu/masters-in-bioethics>

Note: Financial assistance from NCEHC is not available for this course.