

November 16, 2022

VHA HEALTH CARE ETHICS PROGRAM

1. POLICY

a. It is Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy that each Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility sustain a Health Care Ethics Program as outlined in this notice.

b. This notice rescinds VHA Notice 2021-20, IntegratedEthics®, dated October 20, 2021. The National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC) is transforming VHA's Health Care Ethics Program to focus on enhanced health care ethics expertise in VA medical facilities and on the development and maintenance of health care ethics communities. This VHA notice provides interim policy during the transition period to enable staff to focus on the essential health care ethics activities that will move VHA toward the desired future state.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES

This notice:

a. Moves specifications regarding VHA Health Care Ethics Program processes to an associated VHA Health Care Ethics Program Guidebook:

https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Ethics_Programs/Guidebook.pdf. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.*

b. Removes responsibilities for the VA medical facility Preventive Ethics Coordinator and Preventive Ethics Team Members because quality improvement related to health care ethics is now integrated into existing VHA quality improvement processes (e.g., quality management, systems redesign, patient safety) that address clinical and programmatic improvement.

c. Updates responsibilities for the Executive Director, NCEHC; Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director; VA medical facility Director and VA medical facility Ethics Consultant.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Oversight, Risk and Ethics.** The Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Oversight, Risk and Ethics is responsible for ensuring overall VHA compliance with this notice.

b. **Executive Director, National Center for Ethics in Health Care.** The Executive Director, NCEHC is responsible for establishing, interpreting and communicating

standards and guidance for the VHA Health Care Ethics Program.

c. **Veterans Integrated Services Network Director.** The VISN Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring all VA medical facilities within the VISN fulfill the requirements outlined in this notice and informing leadership when barriers are identified.

(2) Communicating the contents of this notice to all VA medical facilities within the VISN.

(3) Ensuring that all VA medical facilities within the VISN have the resources to implement this notice.

d. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Maintaining knowledge about and being supportive of the content and operation of the Health Care Ethics Program at the VA medical facility.

(2) Ensuring that the VA medical facility's leadership team is knowledgeable about and supportive of the content and operation of the Health Care Ethics Program at the VA medical facility.

(3) Meeting regularly with the VA medical facility Ethics Consultation Coordinator (ECC) to review health care ethics consultations and to discuss significant health care ethics issues that impact the VA medical facility.

(4) Ensuring that the VA medical facility ECC has adequate resources and receives protected time to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

(5) Collaborating with the VA medical facility Integrated Ethics Program Officer (IEPO) to maintain a Health Care Ethics Program that is structured and managed according to the provisions of this notice.

e. **VA Medical Facility Integrated Ethics Program Officer.** The IEPO reports on Health Care Ethics Program functioning to the VA medical facility Director and is responsible for:

(1) Collaborating with the VA medical facility Director to maintain a Health Care Ethics Program that is structured and managed according to the provisions of this notice.

(2) Identifying resources (e.g., dedicated time, educational materials, workspace) needed to succeed and communicating identified needs to the VA medical facility Director.

(3) Managing IEWeb permission requests for all VA medical facility staff needing access to IEWeb/Salesforce for documenting ethics consultations and other ethics

activities, according to the instructions included here:

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/SitePages/IEWeb.aspx>. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

(4) Participating in forums, training and activities identified by NCEHC as outlined in the VHA Health Care Ethics Program Guidebook:

https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Ethics_Programs/Guidebook.pdf. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

f. **VA Medical Facility Ethics Consultation Coordinator.** The VA medical facility ECC is responsible for:

(1) Managing the VA medical facility's Health Care Ethics Consultation Service as outlined in the VHA Health Care Ethics Program Guidebook:

https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Ethics_Programs/Guidebook.pdf. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

(2) Serving as a VA medical facility Ethics Consultant (as outlined in paragraph 3.f.).

(3) Requesting support from NCEHC as needed and serving as a liaison between the VA medical facility and NCEHC for health care ethics-related matters (such as health care ethics consultations and community-building activities).

(4) Participating in forums, training, and activities identified by NCEHC as outlined in the VHA Health Care Ethics Program Guidebook:

https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Ethics_Programs/Guidebook.pdf. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

(5) Meeting regularly with the VA medical facility Director to review health care ethics consultations and to discuss significant health care ethics issues that impact the VA medical facility.

g. **VA Medical Facility Ethics Consultant.** The VA medical facility Ethics Consultant is responsible for providing health care ethics consultation services, including ensuring continuing professional development of health care ethics consultation proficiencies, as outlined in the VHA Health Care Ethics Program Guidebook:

https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAethics/Policy%20and%20Guidance/Ethics_Programs/Guidebook.pdf. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

4. VHA Notice 2021-20, IntegratedEthics®, dated October 20, 2021, is rescinded.

5. All inquiries concerning this notice should be addressed to NCEHC (10ETH) at VHAethics@va.gov.

November 16, 2022

VHA NOTICE 2022-12

6. This VHA notice will expire and be archived on November 30, 2023.

**BY DIRECTION OF THE OFFICE OF THE
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH:**

/s/ Alan J. Hirshberg, MD, MPH, FACHE
Acting Associate Deputy Under Secretary
for Health for Oversight, Risk and Ethics

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