IntegratedEthics
Improving Ethics Quality In Health Care

Ethical Leadership Toolkit

A manual for the Ethical Leadership Coordinator

National Center for ETHICS in Health Care
Veterans Health Administration

Employee Education System

Contents

Foreword

Tab 1. Introduction to IntegratedEthics

IntegratedEthics: Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care

Tab 2. Instructions for the Coordinator
(Includes instructions for members of the IntegratedEthics Council)

Roles and Responsibilities
Timeline
Description of Tasks

Tab 3. Contact Information

Tab 4. Communications Materials

Introduction
Improving Ethics Quality: Looking Beneath the Surface
IntegratedEthics: Closing the Ethics Quality Gap
A Brief Business Case for Ethics

Tab 5. Video Course

Tab 6. Tools

Foreword

Welcome to the IntegratedEthics program. We're pleased that you've agreed to play a leadership role in this national initiative to improve ethics quality in health care.

This toolkit provides the basic information and resources to implement IntegratedEthics in your facility, specifically:

- an overview of the **IntegratedEthics model** and **program management,** including descriptions of program structure and the roles of key program personnel
- an overview of the **three core functions** of an IntegratedEthics program
- your **responsibilities** as one of the leaders or coordinators of IntegratedEthics in your facility
- a **task list and timeline** for carrying out your responsibilities
- a **set of tools** to help you accomplish each task

This toolkit is meant to provide a starting place. We envision an interactive process by which facilities can share their best practices—and lessons learned—with one another over time. As you embark on your IntegratedEthics program, we invite you to make it your own. Although each VHA facility comes to this project with unique challenges and opportunities, you'll want to engage with other facilities in your VISN and with the national IntegratedEthics community to help you brainstorm solutions to implementation problems and exchange ideas as you go forward. The National Center for Ethics in Health Care is available to help and to provide additional information and resources to respond to your special needs. We look forward to working with you.

Tab 1

Introduction to IntegratedEthics

IntegratedEthics: Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care

VA: A Leader in Quality and Organizational Change

VA has become the standard-bearer for quality in American health care. VA consistently outperforms other health care organizations on a wide range of quality measures.[1,2] Publications from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to *Business Week* and *Washington Monthly* laud VA for providing "the best care anywhere,"[3–6] and today's VA makes headlines for outranking private health care organizations in customer satisfaction.[4,5] The Agency has been equally lauded as a "bright star" in patient safety.[7] And VA's electronic health record system has earned it Harvard University's prestigious "Innovations in American Government" award.[8]

How did an enormous, public health care system with finite resources take the lead in quality? VA's impressive examples of excellence have resulted from the work of visionary leaders and dedicated staff deliberately creating organizational change. Each organizational change initiative was innovative and established a new national standard that was subsequently adopted by other organizations. Each was based on a recognized need and supported by top leadership. Each was carefully designed and field-tested before being implemented on a national scale. Each involved centrally standardized systems interventions that affected staff at all levels. Each was supported by practical tools and education for staff. And each required not only significant shifts in thinking on the part of individuals, but also significant changes in organizational culture.

As the largest integrated health care system in the United States and a recognized leader in quality and organizational change, VA is now poised to take on a new challenge: to disseminate a systems-focused model to promote and improve ethical practices in health care—and *a new way of thinking about ethics.*

Why Ethics Matters

Throughout our health care system, VA patients and staff face difficult and potentially life-altering decisions every day—whether it be in clinics, in cubicles, or in council meetings. In the day-to-day business of health care, uncertainty or conflicts about values—that is, ethical concerns—inevitably arise.

Responding effectively to ethical concerns is essential for both individuals and organizations. When ethical concerns aren't resolved, the result can be errors or unnecessary and potentially costly decisions that can be bad for patients, staff, the organization, and society at large.[9–12] When employees perceive that they have no place to bring their ethical concerns, this can result in moral distress, a recognized factor in professional "burnout," which is a major cause of turnover, especially among nurses.[13]

A healthy ethical environment and culture doesn't just improve employee morale; it also helps to enhance productivity and improve efficiency.[14–16] Organizations that support doing the right thing, doing it well, and doing it for the right reasons tend to outperform other organizations in terms of such measures as customer satisfaction and employee retention.[17,18] Failure to maintain an effective ethics program can seriously jeopardize an organization's reputation, its bottom line, and even its survival.[19]

Ethics is also closely related to quality. A health care provider who fails to meet established ethical norms and standards is not delivering high-quality health care. By the same token, failure to meet minimum quality standards raises ethical concerns. Thus ethics and quality care can never truly beseparated.

The Concept of Ethics Quality

When most people think of quality in health care, they think of technical quality (e.g., clinical indicators) and service quality (e.g., patient satisfaction scores). But *ethics* quality is equally important.[20] Ethics quality means that practices throughout an organization are consistent with widely accepted ethical standards, norms, or expectations for a health care organization and its staff—set out in organizational mission and values statements, codes of ethics, professional guidelines, consensus statements and position papers, and public and institutional policies.

For example, let's say a patient undergoes a surgical procedure. From a technical quality perspective, the operation was perfectly executed, and from a service quality perspective, the patient was perfectly satisfied with the care he received. So the care was of high quality, right? Well, not necessarily. Imagine that the patient was never really informed—or was even misinformed—about the procedure he received. This would indicate a problem with ethics quality.

The idea of ethics quality as a component of health care quality isn't exactly new. Donabedian, who is widely regarded as the father of quality measurement in health care, defined quality to include both technical and interpersonal components, interpersonal quality being defined as "conformity to legitimate patient expectations and to social and professional norms."[21] Other experts have proposed "ethicality"—the degree to which clinical practices conform to established ethics standards—as an important element of health care quality.[22] And it's been argued that specific performance measures for ethics should be routinely included in health care quality assessments.[20]

Ethics Quality Gaps

Health care organizations in this country have significant "opportunities for improvement" with respect to ethics quality,[23] and VA is no exception. Over the past several years, VA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care has been collecting data on the VA health care system—through formal and informal surveys, interviews, and focus groups—to understand where there are ethics quality gaps. What have we found?

VA employees:

- regularly experience ethical concerns
- want more tools and support to address their concerns
- perceive that the organization doesn't always treat ethics as a priority

Ethics committees or programs:

- are seldom described as influential or well respected
- tend to focus narrowly on clinical ethics and fail to address the full range of ethical concerns in the organization

- operate as silos in relative isolation from other programs that deal with ethical concerns
- tend to be reactive and case oriented, instead of proactive and systems oriented
- often lack resources, expertise, and leadership support
- do not consistently follow specific quality standards
- are rarely evaluated or held accountable for their performance

In addition, VA leaders recently got a wake-up call when an independent audit found material weaknesses in accounting practices and suggested problems with "ethics" and "culture" as a root cause.[18] The audit found evidence that at least in some instances, "making the numbers" seemed to be valued more than ethics. Ironically, the very things that have made VA a leader in quality may actually put the organization at risk from an ethics perspective. VA's keen focus on performance excellence in the clinical and financial arenas, through use of powerful performance measurement and rewards systems, may unintentionally have supported a culture in which "getting to green" is all that counts.

Findings from VA's all-employee survey reveal other opportunities for improvement in ethical environment and culture. High scores in the area of "bureaucratic" culture indicate that the organization emphasizes rules and enforcement.[24] Rules usually define prohibited behavior or minimal standards, instead of inspiring exemplary or even good practices. A rules-based culture tends to emphasize compliance with "the *letter* of the law" as opposed to fulfilling "the *spirit* of the law." From an ethics perspective, overemphasizing rules can lead to "moral mediocrity"[25]—or worse, unethical practices, if employees equate "no rule" with "no problem" or if they "game the rules" by developing ethically problematic workarounds.[26]

While employees in rules-driven organizations tend to concentrate on what they *must* do, those in organizations with a healthy ethical environment and culture tend to concentrate more on what they *should* do—finding ethically optimal ways to interpret and act on the rules in service of the organization's mission and values.

Thus while VA is a leader in quality, historically, the organization hasn't placed a great deal of emphasis on *ethics* quality. To achieve a truly "balanced scorecard," VA needs to systematically prioritize, promote, measure, and reward ethical aspects of performance. IntegratedEthics is the mechanism by which VA will achieve this goal—ensuring that ethics quality is valued every bit as much as other organizational imperatives, such as "making the numbers" and "following the rules."

IntegratedEthics

VA has recognized the need to establish a national, standardized, comprehensive, systematic, integrated approach to ethics in health care—and IntegratedEthics was designed to meet that need. This innovative national education and organizational change initiative is based on established criteria for performance excellence in health care organizations,[27] methods of continuous quality improvement,[28] and proven strategies for organizational change.[29] It was developed by VA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care with extensive input from leaders and staff in VA Central Office and the field, expert panels and advisory groups, and reviewers within and outside the organization. Materials developed for IntegratedEthics underwent validity

testing, field testing, and a 12-month demonstration project in 25 facilities. Now, the expectation is that every VA health care facility will implement the IntegratedEthics model to ensure ethics quality in health care.

Levels of Ethics Quality

Ethics quality is the product of the interplay of factors at three levels: decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture. The image of an iceberg helps to illustrate the concept of ethics quality in health care:

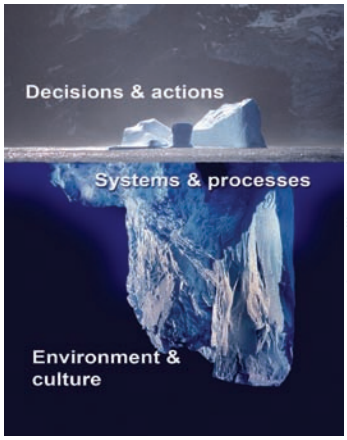


Image courtesy of Uwe Kills. Used with permission.

- At the surface of the "ethics iceberg" lie easily observable *decisions and actions,* and the events that follow from them, in the everyday practices of a health care organization and its staff.
- Beneath that, however, organizational *systems and processes* drive decision making. Not immediately visible in themselves, these organizational factors become apparent when we look for them—for example, when we examine patterns and trends in requests for ethics consultation.
- Deeper still lie the organization's ethical *environment and culture,* which powerfully, but nearly imperceptibly shape its ethical practices overall. This deepest level of organizational values, understandings, assumptions, habits, and unspoken messages—what people in the organization know but rarely make explicit—is critically important since it is the foundation for everything else. Yet because it's only revealed through deliberate and careful exploration, it is often overlooked.

Together, these three levels—decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture—define the ethics quality of a health care organization.

Many ethics programs make the mistake of spending too much time in a reactive mode, focusing only on the most visible of ethical concerns (i.e., the "tip of the iceberg"). But to have a lasting impact on ethics quality, ethics programs must do more: They must continually probe beneath the surface to identify and address the deeper organizational factors that influence observable practices. Only then will ethics programs be successful in improving ethics quality organization-wide.

IntegratedEthics targets all three levels of ethics quality through its three core functions, discussed in detail below: ethics consultation, which targets ethics quality at the level of decisions and actions; preventive ethics, which targets the level of systems and processes; and ethical leadership, which targets the level of environment and culture.

Domains of Ethics in Health Care

Just as IntegratedEthics addresses all three levels of ethics quality, it also deals with the full range of ethical concerns that commonly arise in VA, as captured in the following content domains:

- Shared decision making with patients (how well the facility promotes collaborative decision making between clinicians and patients)
- Ethical practices in end-of-life care (how well the facility addresses ethical aspects of caring for patients near the end of life)
- Patient privacy and confidentiality (how well the facility protects patient privacy and confidentiality)
- Professionalism in patient care (how well the facility fosters behavior appropriate for health care professionals)
- Ethical practices in resource allocation (how well the facility demonstrates fairness in allocating resources across programs, services, and patients)
- Ethical practices in business and management (how well the facility promotes high ethical standards in its business and management practices)
- Ethical practices in government service (how well the facility fosters behavior appropriate for government employees)
- Ethical practices in research (how well the facility ensures that its employees follow ethical standards that apply to research practices)
- Ethical practices in the everyday workplace (how well the facility supports ethical behavior in everyday interactions in the workplace)

In many health care organizations, ethics programs focus primarily (or even exclusively) on the clinical ethics domains, leaving nonclinical concerns largely unaddressed. Another common model is that ethical concerns are handled through a patchwork of discrete programs. In VA facilities, clinical ethics concerns typically fall within the purview of ethics committees, while concerns about research ethics typically go to the attention of the institutional review board, and business ethics and management ethics concerns usually go to compliance officers and human resources staff. These individuals and groups tend to operate in relative isolation from one another and don't always communicate across programs to identify and address crosscutting concerns or recurring problems. Moreover, staff in these programs may not be well equipped to bring an *ethics* perspective to their areas of expertise. For example, when employees experience problems relating to their interactions with persons of a different ethnicity or cultural background, this is often treated as an EEO issue. But resolving the situation might require not just a limited EEO intervention but a more systematic effort to understand the values conflicts that underlie employee behaviors and how the organization's ethical environment and culture can be improved. IntegratedEthics provides structures and processes to develop practical solutions for improving ethics quality across all these content domains.

Rules-Based and Values-Based Approaches to Ethics

In addition to addressing ethics quality at all levels and across the full range of domains in which ethical concerns arise, the IntegratedEthics model takes into account both rules- and values-based approaches to ethics.

Rules-based ethics programs are designed to prevent, detect, and punish violations of law.[25,26,30] Such programs tend to emphasize legal compliance by:[31]

- communicating minimal legal standards that employees must comply with
- monitoring employee behavior to assess compliance with these standards

- instituting procedures to report employees who fail to comply
- disciplining offending employees

In contrast, values-based approaches recognize that ethics means much more than mere compliance with the law. As one commentator put it:

> You can't write enough laws to tell us what to do at all times every day of the week . . . We've got to develop the critical thinking and critical reasoning skills of our people because most of the ethical issues that we deal with are in the ethical gray areas.[32]

For values-based ethics programs, it is not enough for employees to meet minimal legal standards; instead, they are expected to make well-considered judgments that translate organizational values into action—especially in the "ethical gray areas."[25,26] To achieve this, values-based approaches to ethics seek to create an ethical environment and culture. They work to ensure that key values permeate all levels of an organization, are discussed openly and often, and become a part of everyday decision making.

IntegratedEthics recognizes the importance of compliance with laws, regulations, and institutional policies, while promoting a values-oriented approach to ethics that looks beyond rules to inspire excellence.

The IntegratedEthics Model

An IntegratedEthics program improves ethics quality by targeting the three levels of quality—decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture—through three core functions: ethics consultation, preventive ethics, and ethical leadership.

Ethics Consultation

When people make a decision or take an action, ethical concerns often arise. An ethics program must have an effective mechanism for responding to these concerns to help specific staff members, patients, and families. An *ethics consultation service* is one such mechanism. Today, every VA medical center has an ethics consultation service, but there's great variability across the VA health care system in terms of the knowledge, skills, and processes brought to bear in performing ethics consultation. Ethics consultation may be the only area in health care in which we allow staff who aren't required to meet clear professional standards, and whose qualifications and expertise can vary greatly, to be so deeply involved in critical, often life-and-death decisions.

IntegratedEthics is designed to address that problem through CASES, a step-by-step approach to ensuring that ethics consultation is of high quality. The CASES approach was developed by the National Center for Ethics in Health Care to establish standards and systematize ethics consultation. ECWeb, a secure, web-based database tool, reinforces the CASES

The CASES Approach

Clarify the consultation request
Assemble the relevant information
Synthesize the information
Explain the synthesis
Support the consultation process

approach, helps ethics consultants manage consultation records, and supports quality improvement efforts. IntegratedEthics also provides assessment tools and educational materials to help ethics consultants enhance their proficiency.

Ethics consultation services handle both requests for consultation about specific ethical concerns and requests for general information, policy clarification, document review, discussion of hypothetical or historical cases, and ethical analysis of an organizational ethics question. By providing a forum for discussion and methods for careful analysis, effective ethics consultation:

- promotes health care practices consistent with high ethical standards
- helps to foster consensus and resolve conflicts in an atmosphere of respect
- honors participants' authority and values in the decision-making process
- educates participants to handle current and future ethical concerns

Preventive Ethics

Simply responding to individual ethics questions as they arise isn't enough. It's also essential to address the underlying systems and processes that influence behavior. Every ethics program needs a systematic approach for proactively identifying, prioritizing, and addressing concerns about ethics quality at the organizational level. That's the role of the IntegratedEthics preventive ethics function.

To support preventive ethics, the National Center for Ethics in Health Care adapted proven quality improvement methodologies to create ISSUES—a step-by-step method for addressing ethics quality gaps in health care. The IntegratedEthics Toolkit provides practical tools and educational materials to support facilities as they apply the ISSUES approach to improve ethics quality at a systems level.

The ISSUES Approach

Identify an issue
Study the issue
Select a strategy
Undertake a plan
Evaluate and adjust
Sustain and spread

Preventive ethics aims to produce measurable improvements in an organization's ethics practices by implementing systems-level changes that reduce disparities between current practices and ideal practices. Specific quality improvement interventions in preventive ethics activities may include:

- redesigning work processes
- implementing checklists, reminders, and decision support
- evaluating organizational performance with respect to ethics practices
- developing policies and protocols that promote ethical practices
- designing education for patients and/or staff to address specific knowledge deficits
- offering incentives and rewards to motivate and reinforce ethical practices among staff

Ethical Leadership

Finally, it's important to deal directly with ethics quality at the level of an organization's environment and culture. Leaders play a critical role in creating, sustaining, and changing their organization's culture, through their own behavior and through the programs and activities they support and praise, as well as those they neglect and criticize. All leaders must undertake behaviors that foster an ethical environment—one that's conducive to ethical practice and that effectively integrates ethics into the overall organizational culture.

Leaders in the VA health care system have unique obligations that flow from their overlapping roles as public servants, providers of health care, and managers of both health care professionals and other staff. These obligations are sharpened by VA's commitment to providing health care to veterans as a public good, a mission born of the nation's gratitude to those who have served in its armed forces.

- As public servants, VA leaders are specifically responsible for maintaining public trust, placing duty above self-interest, and managing resources responsibly.
- As health care providers, VA leaders have a fiduciary obligation to meet the health care needs of individual patients in the context of an equitable, safe, effective, accessible, and compassionate health care delivery system.[33]
- As managers, VA leaders are responsible for creating a workplace culture based on integrity, accountability, fairness, and respect.[33]

To fulfill these roles, VA leaders not only have an obligation to meet *their* fundamental ethical obligations, they also must ensure that employees throughout the organization are supported in adhering to high ethical standards. Because the behavior of individual employees is profoundly influenced by the culture in which those individuals work, the goal of ethical leadership—and indeed, the responsibility of all leaders—is to foster an ethical environment and culture.

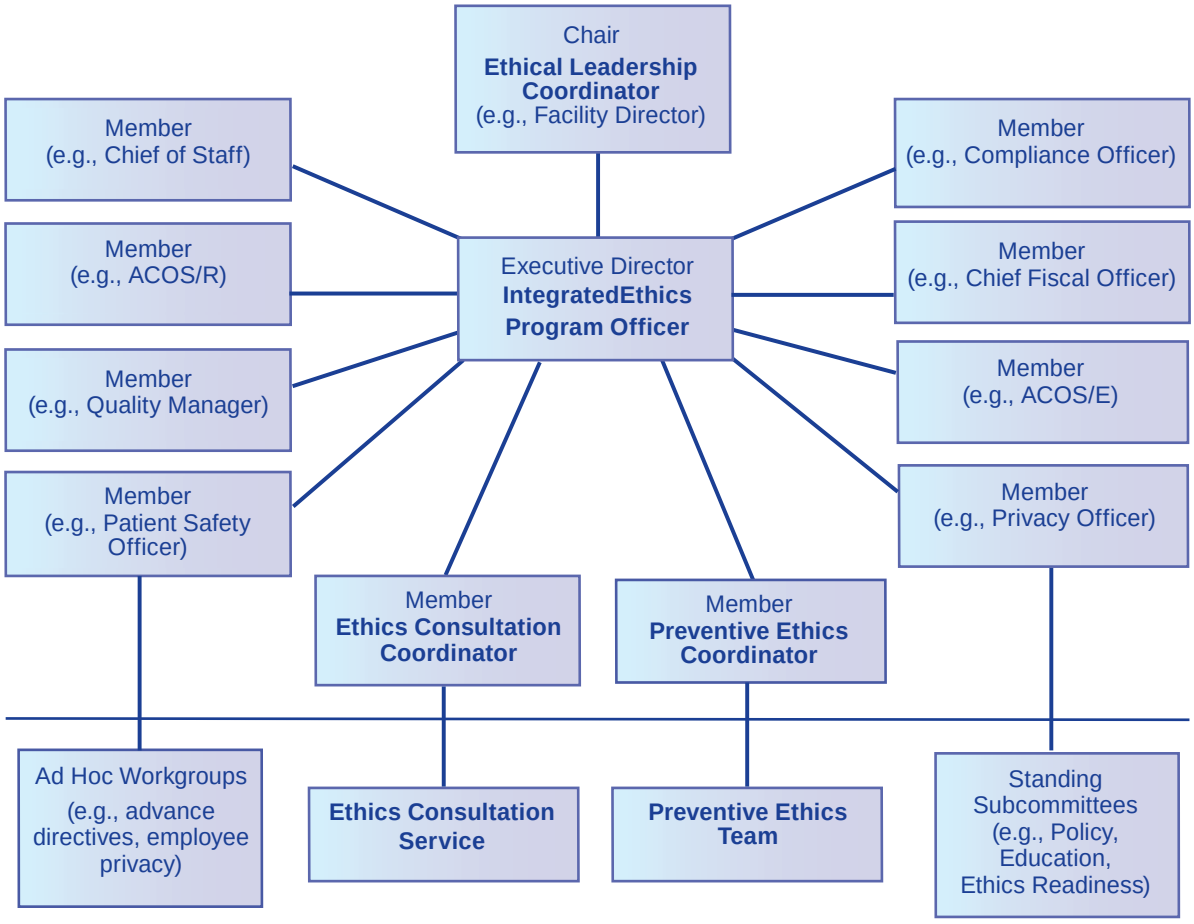
The ethical leadership function of IntegratedEthics calls on leaders to make clear through their words and actions that ethics is a priority, to communicate clear expectations for ethical practice, to practice ethical decision making, and to support their facility's ethics program. These four "compass points" of ethical leadership are supported by tools and educational materials developed for IntegratedEthics.

IntegratedEthics Program Management

Two essential tasks for an IntegratedEthics program are to move ethics into the organizational mainstream and to coordinate ethics-related activities throughout the facility. This requires more than simply implementing the three core functions of IntegratedEthics; it also requires strong leadership support, involvement of multiple programs, and clear lines of accountability. These requirements are reflected in the structure recommended for IntegratedEthics programs within VA facilities.

IntegratedEthics Program Structure

IntegratedEthics Council



The **IntegratedEthics Council** provides the formal structure for the IntegratedEthics program at the facility level. The council:

- oversees the implementation of IntegratedEthics
- oversees the development of policy and education relating to IntegratedEthics
- oversees operation of IntegratedEthics functions
- ensures the coordination of ethics-related activities across the facility

The **Ethical Leadership Coordinator** is a member of the facility's top leadership—e.g., the director. The Ethical Leadership Coordinator ensures the overall success of the IntegratedEthics program by chairing the IntegratedEthics Council, championing the program, and directing the ethical leadership function.

The **IntegratedEthics Program Officer** is responsible for the day-to-day management of the IntegratedEthics program, reporting directly to the Ethical Leadership Coordinator. The program officer works closely with the chair of

the IntegratedEthics Council, functioning in the role of an executive director, administrative officer, or co-chair. The program officer should be a skilled manager and a well-respected member of the staff.

The membership of the council also includes the **Ethics Consultation Coordinator** and the **Preventive Ethics Coordinator,** who lead the ethics consultation service and preventive ethics teams, respectively. Each role requires specific knowledge and skills.

Finally, the council includes **leaders and senior staff** from programs and offices that encounter ethical concerns, for example:

- Chief of Staff
- Chief Fiscal Officer
- Associate Chief of Staff for Research
- Associate Chief of Staff for Education
- Patient Safety Officer
- Director, Quality Management
- Director, Human Resources
- Compliance & Business Integrity Officer
- Research Compliance Officer
- Information Security Officer
- Privacy Officer
- Nurse Manager

In addition to overseeing the **ethics consultation service** and the **preventive ethics team**, the IntegratedEthics Council may also oversee **standing subcommittees** (e.g., policy, education, and JCAHO ethics readiness), as well as one or more **ad hoc workgroups** convened to address specific topics identified by the council.

At the network level, IntegratedEthics is coordinated by the **IntegratedEthics Point of Contact**, who reports directly to the network director or the VISN Executive Leadership Council. In addition to serving as the primary point of contact with the National Center for Ethics in Health Care, this individual facilitates communication across facility IntegratedEthics programs and monitors their progress in implementing IntegratedEthics. Finally, a VISN-level **IntegratedEthics Board** helps to address ethical issues on a network level, especially those that cut across facility boundaries.

IntegratedEthics Program Tools

IntegratedEthics emphasizes distance learning and combines the use of print, video, and electronic media to provide a wide array of resources. These include reference materials and video courses relating to each of the three functions; operational manuals (toolkits) and administrative tools to help program staff organize and document their activities; assessment tools for evaluating program quality and effectiveness; communications materials about IntegratedEthics; and online learning modules to build staff knowledge of ethics topics.

A New Paradigm for Ethics in Health Care

IntegratedEthics builds on VA's reputation for quality and innovation in health care. Like VA's seminal work in performance management, its groundbreaking program

Tool	Function		
	Ethics Consultation	**Preventive Ethics**	**Ethical Leadership**
Reference Tools Primers	*Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care*	*Preventive Ethics: Addressing Ethics Quality Gaps on a Systems Level*	*Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture*
Easy Reference Tools	CASES pocket card	ISSUES pocket card	Leadership bookmark
Administrative Tools	Ethics Case Consultation Summary & Template ECWeb	Preventive Ethics Issues Log & Summary Preventive Ethics Meeting Minutes Preventive Ethics ISSUES Storyboards Preventive Ethics Summary of ISSUES Cycles	
	IE master timeline Timelines for function coordinators		
Assessment Tools	Ethics Consultant Proficiency Assessment Tool Ethics Consultation Feedback Tool		Ethical Leadership Self- Assessment Tool
	IntegratedEthics Facility Workbook (instrument, guide to understanding results) IntegratedEthics Staff Survey (introduction, survey instrument, FAQs)		
Education Tools	Ethics consultation video course Training checklist & video exercises (1–4)	Preventive ethics video course Training checklist & video exercise	Ethical leadership video course Training checklist
	IntegratedEthics online learning modules: Ethics in Health Care, Shared Decision Making with Patients, Ethical Practices in End-of-Life Care, etc.		
Communications Materials	Improving Ethics Quality: Looking Beneath the Surface IntegratedEthics: Closing the Ethics Quality Gap Business Case for Ethics IntegratedEthics poster IntegratedEthics brochure IntegratedEthics slides		

in patient safety, and its highly acclaimed electronic medical record system, IntegratedEthics represents a paradigm shift. By defining ethics quality to encompass all three levels of the "iceberg," the full range of ethics content domains, and both rules- and values-based approaches to ethics, IntegratedEthics provides a new way of thinking about ethics in health care. And its practical, user-friendly tools are designed to translate theory into practice—to make ethics an integral part of what everyone does every day.

IntegratedEthics refocuses an organization's approach to ethics in health care from a reactive, case-based endeavor in which various aspects of ethics (e.g., clinical, organizational, professional, research, business, government) are handled in a disjointed fashion, into a proactive, systems-oriented, comprehensive approach. It moves ethics out of institutional silos into collaborative relationships that cut across the organization. And it emphasizes that rules-oriented, compliance approaches and values-oriented, integrity approaches *both* play vital roles in the ethical life of organizations.

By envisioning new ways of looking at ethical concerns in health care, new approaches for addressing them in all their complexity, and new channels for achieving integration across the system, IntegratedEthics empowers VA facilities and staff to "do the right thing" *because* it's the right thing to do.

From . . .	***To . . .***
Reactive	Proactive
Case based	Systems oriented
Narrow	Comprehensive
Silos	Collaboration
Punishment	Motivation
Rules	Rules + Values

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Tab 2

Instructions to the Coordinator

IntegratedEthics Council—Instructions for Council Members

Your Role and Responsibilities

The aim of an IntegratedEthics program is to improve ethics quality by integrating three core functions: ethics consultation, preventive ethics, and ethical leadership. The IntegratedEthics Council is the body chiefly responsible for achieving this goal. The council is chaired by the Ethical Leadership Coordinator, who is ultimately responsible for the success of the program. The responsibilities of the council are to:

- coordinate the ethics consultation, preventive ethics, and ethical leadership functions
- ensure communication with relevant programs across the organization
- oversee the ethics consultation and preventive ethics functions
- develop and update policy pertaining to the IntegratedEthics program
- coordinate staff education regarding IntegratedEthics and ethics
- evaluate your facility's IntegratedEthics structures and processes
- evaluate ethics knowledge, practices, and culture in your facility
- improve specific ethics practices at your facility
- continuously improve your facility's IntegratedEthics program
- ensure that the facility meets accreditation standards for ethics
- ensure that the facility meets requirements of VHA policy related to ethics in health care

Broadly, your responsibilities are to:

1. **Demonstrate expertise in the IntegratedEthics model**
   Members of the council act as representatives of the IntegratedEthics program across the facility and particularly in their home departments or services. You should be raising the visibility of the IntegratedEthics program and supporting the goals of the program to ensure its success. This role requires that you understand the activities of the council and each of the core functions of IntegratedEthics, serve as a spokesperson for the program in your department or service, encourage staff to participate in training activities, answer questions about the program and its functions, and participate in program activities as appropriate based on your skills and expertise.

2. **Lead or participate in council activities**
   A tenet of excellence in health care is an ongoing commitment to quality improvement. All council members should participate in efforts to improve the quality of the IntegratedEthics program through use of the IntegratedEthics assessment tools and regular quality monitoring of program activities. You'll lead or participate in one or more council activities, which may include participating on a preventive ethics team, leading an education forum about IntegratedEthics for staff or other leaders, updating ethics-related policies, supporting efforts for accreditation readiness, or other activities as needed.

3. **Ensure integration**
   The council is the key mechanism for integrating the ethics activities undertaken by departments, programs, services, and offices across your facility. Council members should represent diverse areas throughout the organization from which ethics issues arise, including clinical care services, research, and business administration. Council members are responsible for helping to identify ethics issues across the facility that might benefit from the work of the council, such as ethics quality gaps that might be appropriate for the preventive ethics team.

4. **Monitor performance**
   The council is responsible for overseeing the activities of the IntegratedEthics program and acting to support its implementation. The council should ensure that the facility achieves the program's implementation goals, completes assessment tools and reports performance monitors to VISN leadership. The council is also responsible for developing plans and taking action on the findings from the IntegratedEthics Facility Workbook and Staff Survey. The council should establish mechanisms to monitor progress toward implementing these plans and the overall IntegratedEthics program effectively.

5. **Network externally**
   All council members are invited to share their program's activities, best practices, and lessons learned. The National Center for Ethics in Health Care will provide forums where this can occur. Check our website, vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics, or more information.

Description of Tasks

Get Started

Get to know the IntegratedEthics Program. Reading the introduction to IntegratedEthics and the IntegratedEthics communications materials is an important first step to ensure that you understand the broad concepts and aims of IntegratedEthics. You'll also want to become familiar with the material in the three primers, *Ethics Consultation: Responding to Ethics Questions in Health Care; Preventive Ethics: Addressing Ethics Quality Gaps on a Systems Level;* and *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture.* You'll return to these documents frequently as you support the launch of IntegratedEthics at your facility. Three IntegratedEthics video courses are also available to you. These courses walk you through important aspects of each of the functions. You may also want to complete one or more of the IntegratedEthics online learning modules to develop your understanding of the IntegratedEthics concept and its application.

Engage with the National IE Community

Register with the national IntegratedEthics website. Council members may wish to register with the IntegratedEthics website (vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics), which is designed to support continuous learning among VA's IntegratedEthics community. The site contains all the materials in the IntegratedEthics toolkits (including the video courses), links to online learning modules, and many other resources and tools. It will be updated regularly.

Understand Your Current Ethics Program

Participate in completion of the IE Facility Workbook. The IntegratedEthics Council is responsible for ensuring completion of the facility workbook. You should contribute your knowledge of facility structure and processes to help the council develop its plan for completing the workbook. You should also participate as needed to identify and implement appropriate responses to workbook findings.

Support administration of the IE Staff Survey. The IntegratedEthics Council is responsible for planning and monitoring the administration of the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey. You should support the council in administering the survey by encouraging staff in your department to participate. The council is also responsible for analyzing survey results and developing a plan to respond to any issues and concerns identified. Your first step is to help publicize the results of the survey, which is essential to demonstrate to staff members that their participation was both important and appreciated. It can also help to further demonstrate the importance of IntegratedEthics and generate greater awareness of your IntegratedEthics program. You will then work with your staff to implement activities developed by the council to respond to the survey results.

Participate in Assigned Council Duties

Coordinate staff education regarding IntegratedEthics and ethics. The council is responsible for taking a systematic approach to ensuring that staff throughout the facility are familiar with IntegratedEthics and knowledgeable about ethics in health care. The council, or a designated subcommittee, should apply a quality improvement approach to ensure that educational efforts are effective in meeting clearly defined

organizational needs. The IntegratedEthics primers, video courses, and online learning modules can serve as basic resources for staff education. Efforts to educate staff in ethics consultation and preventive ethics can be delegated to those functions. Ethics education should also be regularly incorporated into ongoing educational activities, such as grand rounds, case conferences, inservices, and annual meetings.

Update policy related to ethics in health care. In addition to developing policy for your IntegratedEthics program, the council is responsible for ensuring that facility policies relating to ethics in health care—such as informed consent for treatments and procedures, advance directives, or end-of-life care—meet the requirements of VA national policy in the relevant areas. The council or a designated subcommittee should also work with the preventive ethics team to identify and address local policy requirements—or lack of policy—that give rise to systemic ethics quality issues.

Ensure that the facility meets accreditation standards for ethics. The council is responsible for developing specific action plans to ensure that the facility meets accreditation standards around ethics and is ready to meet those standards on an ongoing basis. As of 2006, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations includes 24 standards explicitly pertaining to ethics, patient rights, and organizational responsibilities (RI.1–RI.3.1). It is the council's responsibility to see that the facility meets these standards and those of other relevant accrediting bodies.

Instructions for the Ethical Leadership Coordinator

Your Role and Responsibilities

The aim of ethical leadership is to foster an ethical environment and culture. As a senior leader in your facility and the chair of the IntegratedEthics Council, you're responsible for the overall success of IntegratedEthics in your facility and for ensuring that the council fulfills its responsibilities (described above).

As coordinator of the ethical leadership function, your immediate charge is to provide education on ethical leadership to leaders throughout the organization. They should understand their role and responsibilities in creating and sustaining an ethical environment at your facility. You'll act as a role model for them and, through the use of the IntegratedEthics tools, help them learn to foster an ethical environment and culture.

Broadly, your responsibilities require you to:

1. **Demonstrate expertise in the IntegratedEthics model**
   This Ethical Leadership Toolkit contains everything you need to ensure that you're up to speed: an overview of IntegratedEthics; descriptions of your role and responsibilities as coordinator of the ethical leadership function as well as a description of the responsibilities of the IntegratedEthics Council; the IntegratedEthics timeline to help you organize tasks and activities; the ethical leadership video course; and self-assessment tools to help individual leaders understand how their actions affect the organization's ethical environment and ethics practices and to identify opportunities for improvement. The toolkit also provides communications materials and information about online learning modules on ethics in health care.

2. **Lead your facility's IntegratedEthics program**
   You are the leader and champion of the IntegratedEthics program in your facility. Your role is to visibly support the IntegratedEthics Program Officer and IntegratedEthics Council in developing the program and to champion the goals of IntegratedEthics with all employees. You also have responsibility for creating understanding of and support for ethical leadership concepts among leaders in your facility. You'll be directing their efforts to improve ethical decision-making practices. In support of this effort, you'll ensure that IntegratedEthics assessment tools (facility workbook, staff survey, leadership self-assessment tool) are used at your facility. And you'll establish both a personal plan and a facility plan to respond to the results of these assessments.

3. **Ensure integration**
   The IntegratedEthics Council is the principal means by which to integrate the various ethics activities within your facility. As chair of the council, you'll be responsible for its success. In addition, you'll act as a liaison with leaders outside the council to help them understand the activities and outcomes of the IntegratedEthics program, recognize its value, and support it. You're also responsible for ensuring communication between the IntegratedEthics Council and other leadership committees. As appropriate, you (or your designee) may also act as the representative for ethics on key facility governance committees.

4. **Monitor performance**
   As the individual with overall responsibility for the success of IntegratedEthics in your facility, it's your job to ensure that your facility achieves the program's implementation goals and completes assessment tools—you'll report performance monitors to VISN leadership. You're also responsible for monitoring whether action is taken on findings from the facility workbook and staff survey and whether appropriate progress is made toward implementing IntegratedEthics effectively.

5. **Network externally**
   Along with the IntegratedEthics Program Officer, you'll share information about your function's activities, best practices, and lessons learned through a series of national teleconferences and other forums.

On the following pages, you'll find a timeline and brief descriptions of the specific tasks associated with your responsibilities and those of the program officer and coordinators of the other core functions of IntegratedEthics. All of these tasks should be completed during the initial implementation phase; thereafter, many of the activities will need to be repeated periodically and/or maintained.

Timeline

Ethical Leadership Coordinator	Mo 1	Mo 2	Mo 3	Mo 4	Mo 5	Mo 6	Mo 7	Mo 8	Mo 9	Mo 10	Mo 11	Mo 12
Educate Yourself												
Read EL toolkit and review primer (M 1)												
Complete EL video course (M 2)												
Engage with the VISN IE community (M 1)												
Develop IE Council (M 2 & 3)												
Engage with the National IE Community												
Register with the national IntegratedEthics website (M 1)												
Participate in IE teleconferences (M 3 thru 12)												
Understand Your Current Ethics Program												
Support completion of IE Facility Workbook (M 2 & 3)												
Prioritize results of IE Facility Workbook (M 4)												
Initiate ethical leadership QI from the workbook (M 4 & 5)												
Organize the EL Function												
Identify leaders (M 2 & 3)												
Generate buy in from leaders (M 2 & 3)												
Establish monitoring of ongoing EL functions (M 7 thru 12)												
Educate Leaders												
Distribute IE communications materials (M 3 & 4)												
Arrange to show EL video course (M 3 thru 5)												
Distribute EL primer (M 3 thru 5)												
Support the Staff Survey												
Support administration of IE Staff Survey (M 5)												
Prioritize results of IE Staff Survey (M 6 thru 12)												
Initiate ethical leadership QI from the IE Staff Survey (M 9 thru 12)												
Build Capacity in Systematic Ethical Decision Making												
Analyze ethical decision-making practices (M 7 & 8)												
Enhance facility decision-making practices (M 9 thru 12)												

Description of Tasks

Educate Yourself

Read EL toolkit and review primer. Reading the introduction to IntegratedEthics (Tab 1) and IntegratedEthics communications materials (Tab 4) is an important step to ensure that you understand the broad concepts and aims of IntegratedEthics. You'll also want to review the ethical leadership primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture,* which lays out specific behaviors leaders should use to foster an organizational environment and culture that is conducive to ethical practice. You'll return to this document frequently as you implement and refine the ethical leadership function in your facility.

Complete EL video course. Once you've reviewed the ethical leadership primer, you'll benefit from the ethical leadership video course. As part of this course, you should complete the leadership self-assessment tool and establish a personal action plan based on the results.

Engage with the VISN IE community. Integration is essential at both the facility and VISN level. Through the VISN IntegratedEthics Point of Contact, you and the IntegratedEthics Program Officer will connect with other ethics programs in your VISN in order to share your experiences and ideas about program implementation. You'll also report to your VISN about achievement of IntegratedEthics performance monitors.

Develop the IE Council. Leadership support is essential to the development of an effective IntegratedEthics Council. With the IntegratedEthics Program Officer serving as your administrative officer, you'll chair the council and lead its activities. Together, you'll identify individuals to serve on the council and work to establish effective communication mechanisms and relationships between the IntegratedEthics program and other programs, offices, and leaders throughout the facility.

Engage with the National IE Community

Register with the national IntegratedEthics website. The IntegratedEthics website (vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics) is designed to support continuous learning among VA's IntegratedEthics community. The site contains all the materials in the IntegratedEthics toolkits (including the video courses), links to online learning modules, and many other resources and tools. It will be updated regularly.

Participate in IE teleconferences. These conference calls provide a forum for facilities to solve problems and share solutions in implementing IntegratedEthics. Ethics Center staff will moderate the teleconferences and focus on the needs of the attendees. The content of the calls may include discussing common problems, sharing best practices, or a question-and-answer session with a content expert. You should ensure that appropriate staff at your facility is participating in these calls.

Understand Your Current Ethics Program

Support completion of the IE Facility Workbook. The IntegratedEthics Facility Workbook is intended to help identify gaps in your facility's current ethics program.

The IntegratedEthics Program Officer and IntegratedEthics Council are responsible for completion of the workbook. As the chair of the council, you'll provide assistance and encouragement to ensure the workbook is completed, in particular by providing information needed for the ethical leadership portion of the tool.

Prioritize results of IE Facility Workbook. The IntegratedEthics Program Officer and IntegratedEthics Council will compile information about the gaps in ethics quality that were identified through the workbook. Your responsibility is to help them to prioritize the developmental needs at your facility and guide them in producing and implementing an appropriate corrective action plan.

Initiate ethical leadership QI from the workbook. As the function coordinator, you'll critically review the results from the ethical leadership section of the workbook and plan next steps to enhance ethical leadership in your facility.

Organize the EL Function

Identify leaders. As coordinator of the ethical leadership function, you'll model the IntegratedEthics program for the leaders throughout your facility—that is, employees at the senior executive, and mid-manager levels. As a first step, identify leaders in these categories.

Generate buy in from leaders. To accomplish this, you should communicate directly with the leaders you've identified, preferably at a face-to-face meeting. You should express support for the IntegratedEthics initiative, emphasize the importance of ethical leadership in fostering an ethical environment and organizational culture, explain the role you'll play in coordinating the ethical leadership function, and ask leaders to support the program overall and to complete the ethical leadership video course and self-assessment tool.

Establish monitoring of ongoing EL functions. Through the IntegratedEthics Council, you will develop program goals, establish monitoring mechanisms, and obtain regular updates about council activities and IntegratedEthics functions. You should offer assistance and mid-course corrections to the program as needed.

Educate Leaders

Distribute IE communications materials. You should ensure that all the leaders you've identified receive and read the introduction to IntegratedEthics and the IntegratedEthics communications materials contained in your toolkit to familiarize themselves with the concepts and aims of IntegratedEthics.

Arrange to show EL video course. You may want to delegate the task of ethical leadership education to the IntegratedEthics Program Officer or the IntegratedEthics Council. You should be sure to actively support the education efforts by encouraging leaders in your facility to attend showings of the ethical leadership video. Consider devoting a segment of a scheduled leadership retreat or a regularly scheduled leadership meeting—such as the "director's weekly meeting"—to the video. Or you might schedule several showings for smaller groups to stimulate lively discussion. After showing the video, you or your delegate should distribute the Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool. (See the training checklist for details.) You'll need to keep track of who completed the course and when; follow facility procedures to ensure that participants receive education credits for completing the course.

Distribute EL primer. After they complete the video course, leaders should review the leadership primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture.* This document expands on the material covered in the video course and provides additional information and tools for leaders.

Support the Staff Survey

Support administration of IE Staff Survey. The IntegratedEthics Council is responsible for planning and monitoring the administration of the survey. Your responsibility is to assist them in identifying needed resources and encouraging staff members to complete the survey.

Prioritize results of IE Staff Survey. The IntegratedEthics Council will compile information about the gaps in ethics quality that were identified through the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey. Your responsibility is to help the council—and especially the Preventive Ethics Coordinator—prioritize the issues and concerns identified through the survey process and target quality improvement initiatives to address them.

Initiate ethical leadership QI from the IE Staff Survey. Critically review the results from the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey and identify which, if any, results may require action relating to ethical leadership. Develop an appropriate action plan.

Build Capacity in Systematic Ethical Decision Making

Analyze ethical decision-making practices. To improve leadership decision making at your facility, you must first understand how it is occurring now. Begin by analyzing local decision-making practices to identify whether leadership decisions typically reflect the six key attributes of ethical decision making, such as being values-based. (For more information about the attributes of ethical decision making, see the leadership primer.) You'll want to look at formal processes—for example, whether the attributes are regularly considered and documented in local executive decision memoranda (EDMs) and whether your executive leadership council systematically identifies ethical issues relevant to management decisions or regularly seeks input from the ethics consultation service. You'll also want to examine informal processes, such as whether the environment is conducive to staff bringing up ethical issues during management discussions and whether someone is designated to identify and call attention to potential ethical problems.

Enhance facility decision-making practices. Once you've gained a thorough understanding of local leadership decision-making practices you should propose changes to reflect the six attributes of ethical decision making. Whether decisions are made by an individual leader, an informal leadership team, or a formal leadership board, they should be made in a systematic fashion and should reflect the key ethical attributes. You may find the sample models for ethical decision making included in this toolkit (Tab 6) helpful. Changing the behavior of individuals and groups takes time and practice. Achieve small successes early and continue to build on these over time to reach your final goal of reflecting all six attributes of ethical decision making in your local processes.

Tab 3

Contact Information

Contact Information

For questions regarding the IntegratedEthics initiative, please contact the Center's Washington, DC office:

National Center for Ethics in Health Care
Veterans Health Administration (10E)
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Tel: 202-501-0364
Fax: 202-501-2238

E-mail: IntegratedEthics@va.gov

To join the IntegratedEthics listserv or to access additional information, including program updates, PDFs of the materials in this toolkit, and links to more resources, visit the IntegratedEthics website at vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics.

Tab 4

Communications Materials

Introduction

IntegratedEthics: Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care (Tab 1) provides a comprehensive overview of IntegratedEthics and is one of your primary tools for communicating about the initiative.

The additional communications tools in this collection use a variety of formats to describe the essential features of and rationale for the IntegratedEthics initiative. They provide a brief orientation to IntegratedEthics, introduce the key concepts, and equip you with ready and consistent aids for communicating about IntegratedEthics to others. The materials may be used individually or together, physically or electronically distributed to mail-groups, handed out at meetings, or posted on display boards. The kit contains:

- **Improving Ethics Quality: Looking Beneath the Surface** – Depicting ethics quality as an iceberg, this image shines a bright light on all the components of ethical health care practice, not just the decisions and actions that are readily observed. The iceberg is a useful visual metaphor to start discussion about the importance of underlying systems and processes and environment and culture, as well as the interdependence of all the levels of ethics quality.
- **IntegratedEthics: Closing the Ethics Quality Gap** – This feature story discusses the IntegratedEthics initiative in the context of VA's focus on quality improvement and performance measurement. It quotes various external experts regarding the need for fundamental change in the traditional ethics committee model and the benefits of a more comprehensive and systematic approach.
- **The Business Case for Ethics** – This document summarizes the kind of bottom-line benefits a strong ethics program can bring to an organization – including improved customer satisfaction and employee morale, and reduced risk. For busy executives (and skeptics), this tool explains the potential of IntegratedEthics and will help you champion the transition at your facility.
- **Brochure** – This tri-fold brochure provides a quick overview of the IntegratedEthics initiative. It presents the basic concepts in a Q-A format, focusing on the basic concepts and highlighting what's new about the IntegratedEthics paradigm. It includes endorsements from several senior VHA leaders and will be a handy reference for employees at all levels. (Your facility received a supply; the brochure is also available on the IntegratedEthics website.)
- **Slides** – The slide set highlights the key concepts and advantages of implementing an IntegratedEthics program, and will be especially useful for providing an overview to new audiences. (Available on the IntegratedEthics website only.)

Electronic copies of all items are available at vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics.

Improving Ethics Quality: Looking Beneath the Surface

Only about 10 percent of an iceberg is actually visible above the waterline—the greatest part of its mass lies hidden below the ocean surface. Mariners ignore that submerged mass at their peril.

Ethics quality in health care can be described in much the same way: Some ethical practices are readily visible; others become apparent only when we make an effort to see them. But what is usually unseen is often the most important determinant of ethical practice overall.

At the surface of health care ethics, we can easily observe decisions and actions, and the events that follow from them, in the day-to-day practices of clinicians and administrators. Beneath this, however, organizational systems and processes drive decision making. Not immediately visible in themselves, these organizational factors become apparent when we look for them, for example, when we examine patterns and trends in requests for ethics consultation.

Deeper still lie the organization's ethical environment and culture, which powerfully, but nearly imperceptibly, shape its ethical practices overall. This deepest level of organizational values, understandings, assumptions, habits, and unspoken messages—what people in the organization know but rarely make explicit—is critically important since it is the foundation for everything else. Yet because it's only revealed through deliberate and careful observation, it's often overlooked.

Together, these three levels—decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture—define the ethics quality of a health care organization.

Many ethics programs make the mistake of focusing on what is immediately apparent. They spend most of their time reacting to only the most visible of ethics concerns. But to have a lasting impact on ethics quality, ethics programs must do more: They must continuously look beneath the surface to identify and address the deeper organizational factors that influence observable practices. Only then will ethics programs be successful in promoting ethical practices organization-wide.

IntegratedEthics: Closing the Ethics Quality Gap

VA: A Leader in Quality

VA has been increasingly recognized as a leader in quality health care. In 2004 the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) found that the VA system outperformed all other hospitals on each of its 17 quality measures. Today, such publications as *Business Week*, *The New York Times*, and *U.S. News & World Report* all describe VA health care as the best in the country. How has this enormous and unwieldy system with finite resources and an aging patient population managed to take the lead in health care quality? In part through visionary and committed leaders and staff who have developed standardized, innovative approaches to quality improvement. One example of that vision has been VA's integrated health information system, for which the Agency received Harvard University's "Innovations in American Government Award." The Institute of Medicine acknowledges that VA's "integrated health information system, including its framework for using performance measures to improve quality is . . . one of the best in the nation."

Improving Quality in Ethics

Today, almost every health care institution in the United States has some mechanism for addressing the difficult ethical issues that arise in patient care. But the same pressures that have prompted changes in quality and patient safety—tightening resources, more complex care delivery systems, older and sicker patients—also create new ethical challenges. Can traditional ethics programs respond adequately to this shift? Not according to Arthur Caplan, PhD, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania: "The traditional ethics committee model is reactive—too often it deals primarily with questions about end-of-life care in individual cases. In the current environment, ethics has to be proactive, ready to address a broad set of issues across a lifespan, and to do it with increasing resource constraints."

Frontline health care professionals, too, see a need for change. Gwen Gillespie, advanced practice nurse and ethics committee chair at the VA Medical Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, puts it this way: "Our staff is committed to ethical practices, but we could definitely use some help. Health care is rapidly changing, for example, in the area of organizational ethics. Our ethics committee needs to change as well."

VA leaders likewise realize that "getting to green" on performance measures isn't enough. They want a comprehensive approach to quality that keeps ethics in balance with other priorities. "Success in delivering high-quality, cost-effective health care can't come at the expense of our other values," says Linda Belton, director of VISN 11 in Ann Arbor. "Ethical concerns have to be part of our everyday decision making and we must take proactive, coordinated steps to identify and address ethical concerns."

As the largest health care system in the United States, and a recognized leader in health care quality, VA is a natural laboratory for developing an innovative, systems-focused model to promote and improve ethical practices in health care.

An Ethics Quality Gap

As a first step, VA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care has collected data on the VA system to understand where there are gaps, or "opportunities for improvement." What did they find?

- VA employees think about ethics every day, and want additional educational resources and support to do their jobs better.
- Ethics programs across VA vary considerably in terms of their quality and effectiveness.
- Ethics programs often operate as "silos" instead of being well integrated into the organization's structure and hierarchy.
- Despite significant investments in staff time, few VA health care facilities rigorously evaluate the quality or effectiveness of their ethics activities.

These challenges are hardly unique to VA—they are typical of hospitals in the private sector.

A National Consensus

On a national level, a consensus is emerging about the need for a more systematic approach. Arthur Derse, MD, JD, chair of VHA's National Ethics Committee, director for Medical and Legal Affairs at the Center for the Study of Bioethics at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and former president of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, calls for the development of tools that can be widely adopted: "Constrained resources mean we're limited in what we can do for patients. Therefore we need tools that create efficiencies of scale—policies, manuals, guidance on ethics consultation and how to handle difficult issues at a systems level—to alleviate the pressure on individual facilities to resolve these problems." Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH, director of the Institute for Ethics at the American Medical Association, advocates applying principles of continuous quality improvement: "A systems approach holds a great deal of promise for improving the ethical culture of organizations. It's built on strong assumptions about organizations, that they are constantly in evolution, and amenable to change." Margaret O'Kane, president of NCQA,

agrees: "Ethics programs need to set clear goals and then move toward them. They need a more systematic approach."

The Solution: IntegratedEthics

IntegratedEthics, a national education and organizational change initiative from VA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care, addresses the quality gaps documented in VA and elsewhere. Ellen Fox, MD, Ethics Center director, describes the assumptions that guided the design of this initiative: "To be effective at promoting ethical practices, an ethics program first has to address ethical concerns across many domains, not just in clinical care. Then it has to do three things, and do them well: respond to ethics concerns on a case-by-case basis, address ethics issues on a systems level, and foster an environment and culture that is conducive to ethical practice."

The IntegratedEthics initiative provides VA facilities with a variety of tools to help them achieve these goals. In each facility an IntegratedEthics Council coordinates ethics-related activities across the organization and oversees three core functions that carry out these activities:

- Ethics consultation: responding to ethics questions in health care
- Preventive ethics: addressing ethics quality gaps on a systems level
- Ethical leadership: fostering an ethical environment and culture

The first core function of IntegratedEthics is ethics consultation, which is widely accepted as a necessary part of health care delivery. Ethics consultation is needed to help patients, families, and staff resolve the complex ethical concerns that arise in health care delivery. IntegratedEthics provides facilities with training and resources to ensure that ethics consultation is of high quality.

The second core function of IntegratedEthics is preventive ethics. As Fox notes, "If we're serious about promoting ethical practices, it is not enough to focus on individual decisions and actions. We must also ensure that our systems and processes are designed to make it easy for people to do the right thing." This can be achieved by identifying and addressing systemic organizational issues where ethical concerns indicate that there are ethics quality gaps. The IntegratedEthics materials guide facilities through a process that applies QI principles to identify systems problems, develop strategies to address those problems, and assess how well those strategies worked.

The third core function is ethical leadership. An organization's leaders play an essential role in fostering an overall environment and culture that supports ethical practice. According to Paul Schyve, MD, Senior Vice President for the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, "Quality, safety, ethics—they're all dependent on the culture of an organization. That culture comes from the organization's leaders. Everything from talking about it, to rewarding it, to demonstrating it in their own behavior." Linda Treviño, PhD, of The Pennsylvania State University's Smeal College of Business, an expert on the management of ethical conduct in organizations, stresses: "the perceptions of leadership define the culture—not only what the leaders do themselves but also the behaviors they encourage, support, and don't tolerate in others." IntegratedEthics focuses on four critical leadership skills, or "compass points": demonstrating that ethics is a priority, communicating clear expectations for ethical practice, practicing ethical decision making, and supporting the facility's local ethics program.

Measuring the Impact

Health care managers often suggest that "you can't manage what you can't measure." But as Wynia notes, "Since ethics programs are relatively new, they're also relatively young in the quality improvement realm. One of the problems we've faced is that we don't always agree on what counts as high quality. We need good metrics to measure this." To address this need, the IntegratedEthics initiative includes a variety of tools for assessing the quality and effectiveness of ethics programs—an important innovation in a field that has been criticized for a lack of accountability. These tools include an IntegratedEthics staff survey to assess organizational culture and ethical practices, as well as a facility workbook to assess the organization's health care ethics program.

A National Model

National leaders in health care quality and ethics agree on the importance of an integrated approach. Treviño notes that "the most effective programs are integrated into the organization's culture and the multiple systems, formal and informal, which make up that culture. The most ineffective are those that are limited to a formal program that employees see as disconnected from what's going on day to day." Schyve agrees that "we need to move away from ethics silos. We should have a broad range of stakeholders working together as a team in an effort to resolve ethics issues." Wynia underscores the importance of change: "Ethics structures are going to have to evolve along with the evolving health care system. The ethics of an organization permeates every structure, every committee. Integrating ethics through every structure in the organization will be critical to delivering health care that patients can rely on."

Derse sums up the potential of VA's IntegratedEthics initiative: "VA is a recognized leader in health care quality, patient safety—and now—ethics in health care."

A Brief Business Case for Ethics

A strong ethics program can reap many concrete benefits for a health care organization, from increasing patient satisfaction, to improving employee morale, to conserving resources and saving costs. Here's some of the evidence that doing the right thing is also doing the smart thing:

- ***Increasing patient satisfaction.*** When organizations support ethical health care practices—for example, by encouraging clinicians to actively involve patients in decisions about their health care—patients do better clinically and say they're more satisfied with the care they receive.[1–3]
- ***Improving employee morale.*** Organizations that support ethical decision making—especially organizations whose ethics programs focus on achieving high standards instead of simply complying with policy or law[4]—can expect to have happier, more dedicated employees.[5–7]
- ***Enhancing productivity.*** A strong corporate ethics culture can improve not only employee morale but also performance, and help to improve an organization's efficiency and productivity.[8–10] An effective ethics program also makes it easier to recruit and retain quality staff.[11]
- ***Conserving resources/avoiding costs.*** Effective ethics programs have been shown to improve quality of care and reduce length of stay and cost.[12] Supporting patients' rights to forgo life-sustaining treatment meets an important ethical standard, and at the same time can have the effect of avoiding costs.[13–15]
- ***Improving accreditation reviews.*** As of 2006, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations includes 24 standards explicitly pertaining to ethics, patient rights, and organizational responsibilities (RI.1–RI.3.1). A strong ethics program can help ensure that the organization meets or exceeds those standards.
- ***Reducing ethics violations.*** VA's Inspector General has identified deficiencies relating to patient privacy and confidentiality, advance directives, withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, and informed consent.[16] An effective ethics program can help address such deficiencies in ethics quality. And in health care as in the business world, an effective ethics program can help prevent the sort of practices that can lead to findings of material weakness, or even sanctions or fines, and damage an organization's reputation.[17]
- ***Reducing risk of lawsuits.*** Organizations that make strong commitments to ethical health care practices, such as being honest with patients, can reduce the risk of litigation and liability.[18–20]
- ***Sustaining corporate integrity.*** Ambiguity about values and priorities is one of the major sources of corporate deviance.[21] Making ethics a clear priority in corporate culture helps to ensure good business practices throughout the organization.
- ***Safeguarding the organization's future.*** Lack of an effective ethics program can seriously jeopardize an organization's reputation and even its survival.[22] Creating structures and processes by which an organization can hold itself accountable to its core values and to ethical practices is an investment in the organization's future.

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Tab 5

Video Course

Ethical Leadership Video Course Materials

Training Checklist

All executives and managers should, at a minimum:

- read the IntegratedEthics communications materials
- complete the ethical leadership video course
- read the ethical leadership primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture*

Use the following checklist to make sure that all executives and managers have received the minimum training:

- ☐ **Identify who should receive ethical leadership training.** Your list should include all employees at the senior executive, senior manager, and mid-manager levels, as well as the IntegratedEthics Coordinator.
- ☐ **Assign a staff member to make sure that everyone has read the IntegratedEthics communications materials.** Distribute copies, if necessary.
- ☐ **Schedule several dates and times for the ethical leadership video training sessions.** This is a one-hour session, including an exercise to be completed after the video.
- ☐ **Reserve a room with TV and DVD player for each training session.** Make sure that the room has ample seating and table space for all viewers. The session includes a written exercise following the video.
- ☐ **Photocopy the leadership self-assessment tool and evaluation form for each participant.** A master copy of the assessment tool follows this checklist and is available on the IntegratedEthics website at vaww.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics or www.ethics.va.gov/IntegratedEthics.
- ☐ **Distribute the leadership self-assessment tool after the video.** Encourage completion of the self-assessment tool immediately following the session.

Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool

Instructions for the Ethical Leadership Coordinator

About the Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool

The Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool is designed to help leaders identify areas in which they are successfully modeling behaviors that foster an ethical environment and culture and to highlight opportunities for improvement. The tool is designed to be used in conjunction with the ethical leadership video and primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture.*

This self-assessment tool is intended to challenge each leader to think about individual behaviors—where the leader is strong, where the leader may wish to examine the basis for his or her actions, and opportunities for further reflection—on each of the four points of the Ethical Leadership Compass. Each leader's situation is unique and requires individual consideration of whether increasing use of a behavior or skill could improve leadership practice and thereby the local ethics environment.

Who Should Use the Tool?

The tool is designed for leaders at the executive leadership and mid-manager (division/department/service line managers) levels as defined in VA's High Performance Development Model (HPDM). For more information about the competencies for each level, please see the "Core Competency Definitions" (http://vaww.va.gov/hpdm/pdf/corecompetencydefinitions.pdf).

How to Administer the Tool

This tool should be distributed to leaders after they've taken the ethical leadership video course, and with the ethical leadership primer if it is distributed separately from the video. The self-assessment is meant for each leader's personal use and reflection. Therefore, the course instructor should not collect the completed tool.

How Individual Leaders Use the Tool

Leaders should complete the self-assessment, reflect on their answers, and develop and implement their own action plan. Leaders should also re-take the tool each year to track their progress.

Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool

About this self-assessment tool

This self-assessment tool is designed to be used in conjunction with the ethical leadership video and primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture*. The tool will help you identify areas in which you're successfully modeling behaviors that foster an ethical environment and culture, as well as highlight opportunities for improvement. It's designed for leaders at the senior executive and mid-manager (division/department/service line manager) levels as defined in VA's High Performance Development Model (HPDM). For more information about the competencies for each level, please see the "Competency Definitions" (http://vaww.va.gov/hpdm/pdf/corecompetencydefinitions.pdf).

How to use the tool

This tool will challenge you to think about your own leadership behaviors. Each question suggests a behavior or skill you may wish to develop. Each leader's situation is unique—think about your local situation and whether increasing your use of the behavior or skill could improve your leadership practice and thereby your local ethical environment. There are no right or wrong answers. For this reason, no mechanism is provided to enable you to calculate an overall score or compare your responses to those of other leaders.

After you complete the tool

Immediately following the self-assessment questions, you'll find an action plan. Use it to identify opportunities to improve your leadership practice and local ethical environment and culture.

Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment

Please check one answer for each of the following items:

I. Demonstrate that ethics is a priority	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I tell my staff to make ethics a priority.				
I use examples or stories from my facility or my experience to illustrate the importance of ethics.				
I initiate discussions of ethical concerns.				
In a typical day, I think about ethical issues.				
I demonstrate that I am sensitive to ethical issues in my everyday work.				
I object when someone seems to be ignoring, avoiding, or smoothing over an important ethical issue.				
I explicitly acknowledge staff contributions to promoting ethical practice.				
I include specific expectations for ethical practice in staff performance plans.				
I hold my staff accountable for meeting high ethical standards.				

Section I–continued	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
In conversations with staff, I invite comments about ethical concerns.				
When staff members raise an ethical concern, I thank them for sharing the concern.				
When staff members raise an ethical concern, I ask them to say more.				
I encourage discussion of conflicting values related to organizational decisions.				
I create opportunities for staff discussion of ethics topics.				

II. Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I make a conscious effort to serve as a role model for ethical practice.				
I clearly communicate my expectations for ethical practice to my staff.				
When I communicate my expectations for ethical practice, I explain the values that underlie those expectations.				
When I communicate my expectations for ethical practice, I use examples that illustrate what I mean.				
When I communicate my expectations for ethical practice, I make sure those expectations are realistic and achievable.				
When I communicate my expectations for ethical practice, I make a point to address obstacles that staff might encounter.				
When staff members receive “mixed messages” that create ethical tensions, I take responsibility for clarifying my expectations for ethical practice.				
I encourage staff to talk to me if they feel pressured to “bend the rules.”				

III. Practice ethical decision making	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I explicitly consider ethical issues when making management decisions.				
I use a standardized process to make decisions on management issues with ethical implications.				
When faced with a tough decision, I look to VHA mission and values statements (or similar documents) and use them to evaluate various options.				
When faced with a tough decision, I think through the short-term and long-term effects on various individuals and groups.				
When faced with a tough decision, I make sure that I am not unfairly favoring a particular individual or group.				
When I need advice on an ethical issue, I go to a person with ethics expertise.				
When I need advice on an ethical issue, I refer to published sources				
When making important decisions, I involve those who will be most affected.				
When important decisions are made by a group, I ensure that someone is specifically tasked to call attention to ethical considerations.				
When I announce important decisions to staff, I take time to explain the decision-making process and who was involved.				
When I announce important decisions to staff, I take the time to explain the rationale for the decision.				

IV. Support your local ethics program	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I talk to staff in my facility about how the ethics program works, including:				
- ethics consultation				
- preventive ethics				
- ethical leadership				
- compliance and business integrity				
- research compliance and assurance				
- government ethics				

Section IV–continued	**Almost Never**	**Occasionally**	**Frequently**	**Almost Always**
I receive and review updates about local ethics program activities.				
I seek help from the local ethics program.				
I act to ensure that local ethics activities are adequately funded.				
I act to ensure that local ethics activities are adequately staffed.				
I inform my staff about current local ethics program activities.				
I highlight successes in local ethics program activities for staff.				
I encourage my staff to use the local ethics program when they have an ethical concern.				

Action Plan

Once you have completed the self-assessment questions, complete this action plan to identify opportunities for improvement, taking into account your organizational role. To monitor your progress, repeat this exercise yearly to help you assess whether you have achieved your improvement objectives.

Steps:

1. Based on your responses, choose one action in each of the four points of the Ethical Leadership compass (section I, II, III, or IV) to focus on this year.
2. Within this area, identify several concrete steps you will take to demonstrate your ethical leadership and thereby improve your facility's ethical environment.

Example:

Ethical Leadership Compass III. Practice ethical decision making			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**
I explicitly consider ethical issues when making management decisions.	Almost Never	Frequently	• Change format for executive decision memorandum (EDM) to include reference to ethics (e.g., just as document references financial considerations, it should reference ethical considerations). • Ask myself "Are there ethical issues in this decision?" for at least three management decisions per week for which an EDM is not used.

Ethical Leadership Compass I. Demonstrate that ethics is a priority			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass II. Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass III. Practice ethical decision making			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass IV. Support your local ethics program			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Tab 6

Tools

Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool

About this self-assessment tool

This self-assessment tool is designed to be used in conjunction with the ethical leadership video and primer, *Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment & Culture.* The tool will help you identify areas in which you're successfully modeling behaviors that foster an ethical environment and culture, as well as highlight opportunities for improvement. It's designed for leaders at the senior executive and mid-manager (division/department/service line manager) levels as defined in VA's High Performance Development Model (HPDM). For more information about the competencies for each level, please see the "Competency Definitions" (http://vaww.va.gov/hpdm/pdf/corecompetencydefinitions.pdf).

How to use the tool

This tool will challenge you to think about your own leadership behaviors. Each question suggests a behavior or skill you may wish to develop. Each leader's situation is unique—think about your local situation and whether increasing your use of the behavior or skill could improve your leadership practice and thereby your local ethical environment. *There are no right or wrong answers.* For this reason, no mechanism is provided to enable you to calculate an overall score or compare your responses to those of other leaders.

After you complete the tool

Immediately following the self-assessment questions, you'll find an action plan. Use it to identify opportunities to improve your leadership practice and local ethical environment and culture.

Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment

Please check one answer for each of the following items:

I. Demonstrate that ethics is a priority	**Almost Never**	**Occasionally**	**Frequently**	**Almost Always**
I tell my staff to make ethics a priority.				
I use examples or stories from my facility or my experience to illustrate the importance of ethics.				
I initiate discussions of ethical concerns.				
In a typical day, I think about ethical issues.				
I demonstrate that I am sensitive to ethical issues in my everyday work.				
I object when someone seems to be ignoring, avoiding, or smoothing over an important ethical issue.				

Section I–continued	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I explicitly acknowledge staff contributions to promoting ethical practice.				
I include specific expectations for ethical practice in staff performance plans.				
I hold my staff accountable for meeting high ethical standards.				
In conversations with staff, I invite comments about ethical concerns.				
When staff members raise an ethical concern, I thank them for sharing the concern.				
When staff members raise an ethical concern, I ask them to say more.				
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II. Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I make a conscious effort to serve as a role model for ethical practice.				
I clearly communicate my expectations for ethical practice to my staff.				
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When faced with a tough decision, I think through the short-term and long-term effects on various individuals and groups.				
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When making important decisions, I involve those who will be most affected.				
When important decisions are made by a group, I ensure that someone is specifically tasked to call attention to ethical considerations.				
When I announce important decisions to staff, I take time to explain the decision-making process and who was involved.				
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IV. Support your local ethics program	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always
I talk to staff in my facility about how the ethics program works, including:				
- ethics consultation				
- preventive ethics				
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- research compliance and assurance				
- government ethics				
I receive and review updates about local ethics program activities.				
I seek help from the local ethics program.				
I act to ensure that local ethics activities are adequately funded.				
I act to ensure that local ethics activities are adequately staffed.				
I inform my staff about current local ethics program activities.				
I highlight successes in local ethics program activities for staff.				
I encourage my staff to use the local ethics program when they have an ethical concern.				

Action Plan

Once you have completed the self-assessment questions, complete this action plan to identify opportunities for improvement, taking into account your organizational role. To monitor your progress, repeat this exercise yearly to help you assess whether you have achieved your improvement objectives.

Steps:

1. Based on your responses, choose one action in each of the four points of the Ethical Leadership compass (section I, II, III, or IV) to focus on this year.
2. Within this area, identify several concrete steps you will take to demonstrate your ethical leadership and thereby improve your facility's ethical environment.

Example:

Ethical Leadership Compass III. Practice ethical decision making			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**
I explicitly consider ethical issues when making management decisions.	Almost Never	Frequently	• Change format for executive decision memorandum (EDM) to include reference to ethics (e.g., just as document references financial considerations, it should reference ethical considerations). • Ask myself "Are there ethical issues in this decision?" for at least three management decisions per week for which an EDM is not used.

Ethical Leadership Compass I. Demonstrate that ethics is a priority			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass II. Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass III. Practice ethical decision making			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Ethical Leadership Compass IV. Support your local ethics program			
Ethical Leadership Action	**Current Frequency**	**Goal Frequency**	**Action Steps**

Veterans Health Administration Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

To honor America's veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Core Values

Trust: Trust means having a high degree of confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability and sincere good intent of those with whom we work, of those whom we serve, and the system of which we are a part. Trust is the basis for the caregiver-patient relationship and is fundamental to all that we do in health care.

Respect: Respect means honoring and holding in high regard the dignity and worth of our patients and their families, our co-workers, and the system of which we are a part. It means relating to each other and providing services in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of, sensitivity to and concern for each person's individuality and importance.

Excellence: Excellence means being exceptionally good and of the highest quality. It means being the most competent and the finest in everything we do. It also means continually improving what we do.

Compassion: Compassion means demonstrating empathy and caring in all that we say and do in responding to our co-workers, our patients and their families, and all others with whom we interact.

Commitment: Commitment means meaningful engagement with coworkers, veterans, and families. It includes a promise to work hard to do all that we can in accordance with the highest principles and ethics governing the conduct of the health care professions and public service. It is a pledge to assume personal responsibility for our individual and collective actions.

Vision Statement

To be a patient-centered integrated health care organization for veterans providing excellent health care, research, and education; an organization where people choose to work; an active community partner; and a back-up for National emergencies.

Domains of Values

Quality: To put quality first.

Access: To provide easy access to care, expertise and knowledge.

Function: To restore, preserve, and improve veterans' function.

Satisfaction: To exceed veteran, family, and employee expectations.

Cost-effectiveness: To optimize resource use to benefit veterans.

Healthy Communities: To optimize the health of the veteran and the VA community and to contribute to the health of the Nation.

Source: Under Secretary for Health Information Letter, IL-10-2005-008, May 9, 2005.

Statements of Ethical Principles

There are many different statements of ethical principles. Following are some of the better known formulations relevant to health care ethics and ethical leadership.

Principles of Biomedical Ethics

Respect for Autonomy—respecting a person's right to hold views, make choices, and take actions in accordance with personal values and beliefs

Non-maleficence—doing no intentional harm

Beneficence—contributing to the welfare of others

Justice—distributing goods and treatment fairly and equitably

Source: Beauchamp TL, Childress JF. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics,* 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press;2001.

Moral Rules

Do not kill

Do not cause pain/disable

Do not deprive freedom

Do not deceive

Keep your promise

Do not cheat

Obey the law

Do your duty

Source: Gert B. *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do.* New York: Oxford University Press;2004.

Ethical Considerations in the Business Aspects of Health Care

Compassion and respect for human dignity

Commitment to professional competence

Commitment to a spirit of service

Honesty

Confidentiality

Good stewardship and careful administration

Source: Woodstock Theological Center. *Seminar in Business Ethics.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press;1995. Available at http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/woodstock/business_ethics/health.htm.

Tavistock Principles

Rights—people have a right to health and healthcare

Balance—care of individual patients is central, but the health of populations should also be our concern

Comprehensiveness—in addition to treating illness, we have an obligation to ease suffering, minimize disability, prevent disease and promote health

Cooperation—healthcare succeeds only if we cooperate with those we serve, each other, and those in other sectors

Improvement—improving healthcare is a serious and continuing responsibility

Safety—do no harm

Openness—being open, honest and trustworthy is vital in healthcare

Source: The Tavistock Group. Shared ethical principles for everyone in health care: a working draft from the Tavistock Group. *BMJ* 1999;318:248-51. Available at http://www.bmj.com.

Aims for Improvement in Health Care

Safe—avoiding injuries to patients from the care that is intended to help them

Effective—providing services based on scientific knowledge to all who could benefit and refraining from providing services to those not likely to benefit (avoiding under use and overuse)

Patient-centered—providing care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs, and values and ensuring that patient values guide all clinical decisions

Timely—reducing waits and sometimes harmful delays for both those who receive and those who give care

Efficient—avoiding waste, in particular waste of equipment, supplies, ideas, and energy

Equitable—providing care that does not vary in quality because of personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic status

Source: The Institute of Medicine. *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Healthcare System for the 21st Century.* Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences Press;2001. Available at http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=5432.

Professional Codes of Ethics

American College of Healthcare Executives
ACHE Code of Ethics
www.ache.org/abt_ache/code.cfm

American College of Radiology
Code of Ethics
www.acr.org (membership required)

American Medical Association
AMA Code of Medical Ethics
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/2512.html

American Nurses Association
The Code of Ethics
nursingworld.org/ethics/ecode.htm

American Pharmacists Association
Code of Ethics for Pharmacists
aphanet.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=2809

American Psychological Association
Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
www.apa.org/ethics/homepage.html

American Society of Public Administration
Code of Ethics and Implementation Guidelines
http://ethics.iit.edu/codes/coe/amer.soc.public.admin.c.html

Association of Professional Chaplains
Code of Ethics
www.professionalchaplains.org/professional-chaplain-services-about-code-ethics.htm

National Association of Social Workers
Code of Ethics
http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp

More professional codes of ethics can be found at http://ethics.iit.edu/codes/.

Organizational & Public Policies

VHA Directive 2001-027, Organ Transplants
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=323

VHA Directive 2003-008, Palliative Care Consult Teams (PCCT)
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=231

VHA Directive 2003-021, Pain Management
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=246

VHA Directive 2003-060, Business Relationships Between VHA Staff and Pharmaceutical Industry Representatives
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=288

VHA Directive 2005-049, Disclosure of Adverse Events to Patients
http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1339

VHA Handbook 1004.1, Informed Consent for Treatments and Procedures
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=404

VHA Handbook 1004.2, Advance Health Care Planning (Advance Directives)
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=420

VHA Handbook 1004.3, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Protocols Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1150

VHA Handbook 1058.2, Research Misconduct
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1259

VHA Handbook 1200.5, Requirements for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=418

VHA Handbook 1605.1, Privacy and Release of Information
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=406

VHA Manual M-2, Part VI, Chapter 9, Post-Mortem Examination
www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=855

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch
usoge.gov/pages/forms_pubs_otherdocs?fpo_files/references/rfsoc_02.pdf

5 USC 2302(b), Prohibited Personnel Practices
www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode

5 USC 2301(b), Merit System Principles
www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode

Other important standards are established by accrediting bodies, such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO, http://www.jointcommission.org) and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF, http://www.carf.org).

VISN 11 Framework for Ethical Decision-Making[1]

VISN 11 Corporate Ethics Committee

This Framework is intended as a guide to help employees of VISN 11 make decisions. Decision making can sometime be very difficult, especially when there is not a policy or work rule to govern the situation or there is more than one possible "right" answer. It is at times like this that ethical dilemmas occur. The purpose of this tool is to enable any staff member to think critically about situations and craft ethical, value-driven and timely responses. This tool can also be used by facility or VISN Senior Management to assist in arriving at decisions complementary to VISN 11 values and goals.

TO BEGIN: Please read the instructions below and follow the steps.

FIRST: State the situation or problem that compels the need for a decision. What is the ethical dilemma?

SECOND: Identify options to deal with the situation as defined above. There are at least two options in every situation, one of which is to do nothing.

1.

2.

3.

THIRD: Evaluate all options generated using the grid below for each one. The first cut:

	Option 1		Option 2		Option 3	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Does this violate any known laws or regulations?						
Is there personal gain?						
Is there misuse of position?						
Is there a conflict of interest?						

If the answers to all questions are NO, proceed to the next step. If the answer to any of the questions is YES, reconsider your options.

1. Developed by Susan Bowers, Director, Richard L. Roudeboush VA Medical Center, Indianapolis, Ind.

Next, consider Values, Goals and Ethical Principles for each of the options.

	Option 1			Option 2			Option 3		
	Support	*Neutral*	*Conflict*	*Support*	*Neutral*	*Conflict*	*Support*	*Neutral*	*Conflict*
VALUES									
Trust									
Respect									
Compassion									
Commitment									
Excellence									
GOALS									
Quality									
Access									
Functional Status									
Customer Service (internal and external)									
Cost and Value									
Community Health									
ETHICAL PRINCIPLES									
Autonomy: Respect individual freedom of choice									
Non-maleficence: Do no harm to others									
Beneficence: Do good and prevent harm									
Justice: Fair treatment according to needs; fair distribution of resources									
Fidelity: Honest, truthful, loyal, faithful, honoring commitments made									

FOURTH: Select the most desirable option

FIFTH: Are there organizational barriers or political considerations in implementing the option? If so, how will these be dealt with and resolved?

SIXTH: Develop an action plan to implement your decision. Who needs to know this decision and how will it be communicated? How will it be implemented? (Also, consider if this should be a "lesson learned" and shared more broadly.)

FINALLY: How will this be evaluated? In what time frame will this process be reviewed and in what manner will it be reviewed?

Fairview Health Services—Integrative Ethics Committee Decisionmaking Process for Complex Questions of Organizational Ethics[2]

The following process may be used by a single decisionmaker, by a group of decisionmakers and stakeholders, or an ethics committee depending on the type, seriousness, sensitivity, novelty, and urgency of the issue at hand.

1. Clarify the core question(s) and/or concern(s) to be addressed.

2. Identify the decisionmaker(s) and the stakeholders affected by the issue.

3. Assemble background information and identify the stakeholders' understanding of the facts.

4. Clarify the nature of the opportunities, conflicts, or uncertainties this issue raises for the stakeholders. If any type of harm is being alleged, identify the harm(s), who would be harmed, the probability of harm, and who is alleging the harm(s).

5. Brainstorm possible options. Invite solutions that both satisfy the stakeholder's most cherished values and goals and that acknowledge competing values and goals.

6. Identify the values at stake in the options identified.

7. Prioritize the stakeholders involved in this issue.

8. Prioritize the values as to their importance to the core question(s)/concern(s) and Fairview's mission and core values.

9. Consider each option in light of its likelihood of achieving/maximizing the prioritized values.

10. Identify the solution(s) that (best) supports Fairview's mission and core values without sacrificing or damaging any core value. Is there a solution that honors and integrates all of the values?

11. Make the decision or recommendation and when appropriate design a communication and implementation plan.

12. When appropriate monitor and evaluate long-term consequences.

2. Adapted from Woodstock Theological Center. Ethical issues in managed care organizations; Light DW. Towards a pragmatic method for assessing moral problems. In Spencer EM, et al. Organization Ethics in Health Care. Oxford: Oxford University Press;2000; and Institute for Ethics National Working Group. Organizational Ethics in Healthcare. Chicago: American Medical Association;2000.

Additional Models for Ethical Decision Making

For more models of ethical decision making see:

The Method to Arrive at an Ethical Decision
www-hsc.usc.edu/~mbemste/tae.decisions.bernstein.html

Ethics and Decision Making: Questions for Consideration
http://plsc.uark.edu/book/books/ethics/guide.html

A List of the Top Ten Questions You Should Ask Yourself When Making an Ethical Decision
www.mtsu.edu/~u101irm/ethicques.html

A Framework for Ethical Decision Making
www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html

Ethical Decision-Making Quick Test
www.refresher.com/!bahquicktest.html

Introducing the Ethics Workshop
www.meddean.luc.edu/lumen/MedEd/IPM/medp2a.htm

Ethical Leadership

Fostering an ethical environment and culture: Four Compass Points

Demonstrate that ethics is a priority

- Talk about ethics
- Prove that ethics matters to you
- Encourage discussion of ethical concerns

Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- Recognize when expectations need to be clarified
- Be explicit, give examples, explain the underlying values
- Anticipate barriers to meeting your expectations

Practice ethical decision making

- Identify decisions that raise ethical concerns
- Address ethical decisions systematically
- Explain your decisions

Support your local ethics program

- Know what your ethics program is and what it does
- Champion the program
- Support participation by others

National Center for ETHICS in Health Care
Veterans Health Administration

IntegratedEthics
Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care