

## ***Building and Spreading Ethical Leadership Enhancement Initiatives: What Works?***

When the IntegratedEthics Council (IEC) at the Providence VAMC first talked about disseminating the IE program, the members had a lengthy discussion about values. “If we were going to have an ethics program, we needed to demonstrate that people’s behavior is driven by values and that, unless we emphasized our organization’s values, then the concept of ‘ethics’ would be meaningless,” explained **Nancy Lancaster**, IntegratedEthics Program Officer (IEPO). “Then we asked ourselves, how can we make the topic of ‘values’ interesting and interactive?” Inspired by the practices of another facility, they decided to engage staff at all levels across the facility in monthly discussions about values.

While individual services can choose their own topics, the IEC also sends out monthly suggestions to the entire facility. Often, these suggestions relate to a holiday. In the spirit of Independence Day, for example, people discussed famous quotes related to citizenship and liberty. In association with Valentine’s Day, they shared thoughts on caring and fidelity. The point is that everybody is talking — and talking regularly — about values, which builds momentum across the organization. “Through these discussions people learn that everybody does not necessarily share the same values. As a result, we talk values all the time, even in executive meetings,” said Ms. Lancaster.

This is just one example of how ethical leadership practices, fostered by the IE program, are transforming the environment and culture at VHA facilities across the country.

**“We talk values all the time, even in executive meetings.” — Nancy Lancaster, IEPO, Providence VAMC**

### **Engaging Leaders and Staff in Ethical Concerns at Deeper Levels**

The most impactful ethical leadership projects often fill an identified ethics quality gap or address a demonstrated facility need. For example, Grand Junction VAMC’s most recent results of the IE Staff Survey (IESS) informed facility Director **Terry Atienza** and the IEC that they had not educated staff adequately about resource allocation. In response, Mr. Atienza met with the Quadrad and IE team members to draft an action plan to engage leadership in this area, which in turn led to All-Employee Forum discussions and the circulation of a “Fiscal Tip of the Month.”

At the Forums, staff at all levels can ask the Director and members of the Quadrad the “tough questions” relating to resource allocation, acceptance of gifts, and other ethical concerns. “I also conduct listening rounds in every department where I discuss our budget status with frontline staff to ensure that management decisions related to resources are aligned with staff expectations and patient care needs,” Mr. Atienza wrote in an e-mail.

These efforts have had the effect of making the resource allocation process more transparent. “Leadership participation shows staff that we are all working together to do our best to be fiscally responsible and, at the same time, provide the best care for our Veterans,” **Terri Gossett**, facility IEPO, said.



New — and seasoned — VHA leaders can be oriented to ethics-related activities through existing leadership development programs. According to IEPO **Gloria Hilton**, Tampa-based James A. Haley Veterans Hospital's PRIDE program works with the IEC to market the IE program and spread awareness of ethics issues. In spring 2010, the group helped mount an IntegratedEthics Fair that featured an ethics poster competition. Because this event asked people to focus on their service's unique contributions to an ethical culture, the response was "overwhelming," said Dr. Hilton. "Twenty-six services participated. Staff came up with the ideas for the posters and winners received prizes and a featured mention in the Director's Newsletter."

This fiscal year, the Birmingham VAMC selected managers who had recently completed its Mentor Certification Program to lead a formal ethics-related mentoring program. Its purpose was to expose leaders to the ethical leadership component of the IE program and how to use the Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment tool to guide their management practices. According to IEPO **Rickey Harris**, the program prioritized recruiting mentees who held positions that wielded widespread organizational impact. The result? "Approximately 40 executive and mid-level managers now know how to practically apply proven ethical leadership principles."

### Making Ethics "Routine"

When leaders can integrate ethics concerns into institutional policy and practice, they make it easier for everyone to do the right thing. At VA Salt Lake City HCS, IEPO **Dawn Hibl**'s involvement with ethics is not limited to the IE program. She also became a Chapter Champion for Joint Commission Readiness a couple of years ago. In this role, she reviews the Joint Commission (JC) standards that relate to ethics, and ensures that leadership-oriented standards address ethical concerns. As part of the facility policy mail group, she also provides an ethics voice by reviewing proposed new policies.

In Tampa, the IE function coordinators actively collaborate with numerous services in developing policy. For example, "The PE team discovered that the facility lacked a policy governing gifts and donations. We worked with Voluntary Service to draft policy and with Regional Counsel

to educate employees on how to deal appropriately with families who give them gifts," said **Gladys Worlds**, PE Coordinator. In fact, Tampa is so serious about spreading ethical leadership practices that it developed an Executive Career Field Performance Standard for IE this fiscal year. The standard requires Service Chiefs to support IE by using the ethics consultation (EC) service and contacting the IEPO or IEC when systems-level ethics quality gaps are recognized; engaging in IE education; and "contributing to the ethical environment and culture by striving to do the right things for the right reasons, and encouraging others to do the same." To help Chiefs and Supervisors meet the measure, the facility hosted an Ethics Awareness Day in the spring that featured an education session on ethical leadership led by **Susan Bowers**, VISN 18 Network Director.

**"Because leadership is very supportive of the IE program, we're seeing a trickle-down effect." — Chaplain David Czartorynski, EC Coordinator, James A. Haley Veterans Hospital (Tampa)**

### Keeping the Conversations Going

In addition to her responsibilities as Chapter Champion and policy mail group member, Ms. Hibl is a voting member of her facility's Executive Board, where she ensures that ethics is always part of the conversation. "I find that they really look to me for guidance and advice on ethics issues at many different levels," she explained. "If there is any leadership meeting I want to go to, I just have to ask." During the meetings, she raises topics that could have an ethical dimension and provides examples of decision-making processes that raised ethical concerns.

Frequent communication about ethical concerns is also happening in Grand Junction. "Any issues that employees identify are addressed by one or more members of our Quadrad," Ms. Gossett said. "When indicated, follow-up is done directly with employees or through follow-up agenda items at the next committee meeting."

And transparency proved to be invaluable in Providence. "An IEC member was in the coffee shop and overheard a patient discussing the results of a JC inspection of the facility that had been published in the newspaper," said Ms.

Lancaster. “That’s when we knew we had to be open and honest; if employees cannot find accurate information, they will make it up.” The facility intranet now includes a link where employees can access public reports from accrediting agencies.

### Assessing Impact

IE teams do not have to wait for the IESS to measure the impact of ethical leadership initiatives. They can, for example, conduct follow-up surveys, analyze trends in EC requests, and observe increased interest from staff regarding ethical concerns.

“The most important impact we have seen is the willingness of our staff to bring ethics issues to the surface and ask the difficult questions,” said Ms. Gossett. “By making our processes transparent, people become educated about how and why decisions are made. When leadership publicly talks about ethics, it demonstrates to staff that it is OK to bring up an ethical concern.” She also noted that since ethics was added as a standing agenda item, the facility has had three times as many EC case

requests as in the previous fiscal year.

Tampa has also noticed an uptick in the number of EC requests. “As people become more aware, they are asking more questions about ethics in their services, including administrative divisions. Because leadership is very supportive of the IE program, we’re seeing a trickle-down effect,” said Chaplain **David Czartorynski**, Tampa’s EC Coordinator. Moreover, owing to the current excitement about ethics, the EC service received approval to open two new EC sub-groups that focus specifically on consults from the Community Living Center and the Mental Health unit. The sub-groups do not function as separate entities, but also participate in ECS consultations from the main facility.

Meanwhile, the monthly values discussions at Providence are catching on. “People are enjoying them,” said Ms. Lancaster. “The discussions are becoming part of the group’s work. One of the conversations we continue to have is that values are not on paper, they are what you do, exemplified by the values you hold. This activity is a long-term effort, not a quick fix.” ❖

## Ethical Leadership Enhancement Initiatives: Strategies for Success

### Birmingham VAMC:

- Formal mentoring program involving executives and mid-level managers that explored practical applications of the Ethical Leadership Compass and the Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment tool (ELSA)

For more information, contact Rickey Harris at [rickey.harris2@va.gov](mailto:rickey.harris2@va.gov).

### Grand Junction VAMC:

- Publicity efforts including Compliance and Ethics Week activities that featured education on IE, preventive ethics (PE), and ethics consultation (EC) teams
- Ethical leadership (EL) improvement efforts on resource allocation involving:
  - Ethics and resource allocation as standing agenda items
  - Facility-wide employee surveys
  - “Fiscal Tip of the Month” for employees, concerning facility funding and expense reporting
- Ethics program brochure and posters informing employees how to identify and report an ethical concern
- Employee education about IE programs and gift giving

For more information, contact Terri Gossett at [terri.gossett@va.gov](mailto:terri.gossett@va.gov).

**(Continued on next page)**

**Providence VAMC:**

- Monthly values discussions at committee/department meetings across the facility
- Increased transparency by providing employees information regarding facility inspections via a link to public information on the facility intranet

For more information, contact Nancy Lancaster at [nancy.lancaster@va.gov](mailto:nancy.lancaster@va.gov).

**VA Salt Lake City HCS:**

Additional ethics-related responsibilities for the IEPO include:

- Chapter Champion for Joint Commission Readiness responsible for reviewing standards (including leadership standards) relating to ethics
- Review of ethics aspects of new policies
- Voting member of the Executive Board, where she ensures that ethics is always part of the discussion

For more information, contact Dawn Hibl at [dawn.hibl@va.gov](mailto:dawn.hibl@va.gov).

**James A. Haley Veterans Hospital (Tampa):**

- Comprehensive EL improvement efforts, including:
  - Ethics Awareness Day that featured EL training for Service Chiefs and Supervisors
  - Executive Career Field (ECF) Performance Standard related to ethics and the IE program
- Ethics-related project mounted by Positive Results in Diversity Enhancement (PRIDE), the facility's pre-existing leadership development program:
  - Ethics conversations in each service
  - IE program awareness quizzes
  - IntegratedEthics Fair with a poster competition between the services

For more information, contact Gloria Hilton at [gloria.hilton@va.gov](mailto:gloria.hilton@va.gov).

Developed by the IntegratedEthics team at the National Center for Ethics in Health Care, IntegratedEthics in Action is published on the IE website [www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEaction.asp](http://www.ethics.va.gov/integratedethics/IEaction.asp), listserv, and via other IE venues. Its purpose is to rapidly disseminate promising practices and feature emerging IE champions to help facilities and VISNs in their implementation of the IE initiative. We welcome your comments and suggestions for topics to: [vaethics@va.gov](mailto:vaethics@va.gov).