IE Retreat: Lexington Takes a Day Out to Move Forward

VHA facilities have used multiple approaches to attain widespread "buy-in" for the IntegratedEthics initiative. The Lexington VAMC conducted a day-long, off-site retreat for IE team and Council members in August 2007. Facility Director Sandy J. Nielsen, reported that after the retreat staff and leaders felt more interested and invested in the IE program, which helped to establish a "critical mass" of support for IE at her facility. Recently, we asked Ms. Nielsen to share more details about the retreat, and its impact on the implementation of IE at her facility over the past year.

Why did you decide to hold the retreat?

We wanted to disseminate a lot of information about the new ethics concepts quickly and without distractions to key leadership and others who were identified as "early adopters." "The goal was to provide basic training to the IntegratedEthics Council, and Preventive Ethics team and Ethics Consultation Service, complete the Facility Workbook sections, discuss ethical 'gaps' in our organization, and develop a plan of action for the coming year. We felt this was a way of 'jump-starting' the program here."

Who organized the retreat? What approvals did you need?

The IE Program Officer worked with me to organize the agenda, presentations, and reserve the meeting rooms in a local hotel. We used Medical Center funding to pay for meeting space.

> "Staff members are interested in ethical issues, and are very willing to engage in discussion about how to apply the concepts."
>
> **Sandy J. Nielsen**
> **Lexington VAMC**

What did you do at the retreat?

In the opening general session, we shared the goals of the IE program, reasons why it is important, and the program's basic structure. We then conducted break-out sessions for the Ethics Consultation Service, the Preventive Ethics team, and the members of the IE Council. Each group worked with the IE videos, primers and related tools and completed the IE Facility Workbook to assess our current state and identify gaps and concerns. We also created a "parking lot" of topics that would be addressed by our Council over the following year. (*See Figure 1, pg 2 for agenda*)

What did the retreat accomplish?

- Sent a clear message from the Facility Director about IE's value and potential benefit to the organization.
- Ensured rapid dissemination of new concepts to key leaders.
- Achieved completion of training for teams and Council members.
- Increased team focus on the Facility Workbook and programmatic development of IE.
- Provided an opportunity to discuss organizational "gaps" and plans for addressing them in the coming year.
- Offered a forum where employees from the Preventive Ethics team and Ethics Consultation Service could develop bonds while learning and discussing issues together.

What barriers, if any, did you encounter when planning or running the retreat?

None. Attendance, participation, and engagement were good. In fairness, the fact

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that as Facility Director, I spearheaded the effort undoubtedly smoothed the way because my actions demonstrated leadership's commitment to this new initiative.

Do you plan to hold another such event?

We may, depending on the results of the IE Staff Survey. After the retreat, the Ethics Consultation team held its own half-day training session at the facility that was guided by someone with extensive ethics consultation experience. During this session, team members learned more about their roles and walked through some sample cases.

What lessons did you learn?

Staff members are interested in ethical issues, and are very willing to engage in discussion about how to apply the concepts. It was important to explain "IntegratedEthics," and the newer concept of "Preventive Ethics." Participants were from a broad spectrum of professional backgrounds, and their varying perspectives and expertise enriched the discussion. This was the first time that many had been exposed to the idea of organizational ethics, not just ethical decisions involving patient care.

Do you have any other advice for facilities who are interested in holding IE-focused retreats?

- Plan to use the time effectively, i.e., make participants feel that it's a good use of their time.

- Tap staff members that have a genuine interest in ethics

- Use real situations to talk about ethical problems.

- Secure sufficient administrative support, especially if the teams are chaired by clinicians or high-level executives.

- Use breakout sessions to allow each group to complete their portions of the Facility Workbook, bond, and develop strategies for the coming year.

Ethics Retreat Agenda
**Location: Crowne Plaza Campbell House Inn
1375 Harrodsburg Road**

8:00 - 8:15	Check in and Seating
8:15 - 8:30	Welcome - Ms. Nielsen
8:30 - 9:30	IntegratedEthics Overview & Discussion - Ms. Nielsen
9:30 - 10:30	Training and discussion by focus group
	• Council: Ms Nielsen
	• Preventive: Dr. Breeden
	• Consultative: Ms Weatherbee
10:30 - Noon	Workbook Completion/ Discussion
Noon - 1:00	Lunch
1:00 - 1:30	Update of Group Discussions by Group Leaders (Lg Group)
1:30 - 3:30	Focus groups develop annual work plan based upon workbook assessments
3:30 - 4:15	Group Presentations to Large Group
	• Identify major issues/concerns raised during workbook assessments & a plan to address the priorities
	• What further education is needed for members of the group?
	• Plan for staff education
	• When will the committee start meeting and taking referrals?
	• What support is needed for group to be a success?
	• What other staff members need to be added?
4:15 – 4:30	Final Comments - Ms. Nielsen

Figure 1. Agenda for Lexington VAMC IntegratedEthics Retreat

Now that over a year has elapsed since the retreat, what perceived impact has it had on the staff that attended?

It enabled us to get many key people trained and engaged in a very short timeframe. This has allowed us to focus on further developing the local IE program in the time since. ❧

DID YOU KNOW . . .
INTRANET VS. INTERNET

The National Center for Ethics in Health Care ("Center") has both an internet (http://www.ethics.va.gov), and intranet site (http://vaww.ethics.va.gov), but you can find *all* IntegratedEthics materials ONLY on the intranet. Click on the intranet link above and bookmark it in your web browser to make sure you find what you are looking for.

What's the difference?

On the internet the only items available are the Ethical Leadership, Ethics Consultation, and Preventive Ethics primers, plus the IE tools (one file for each IE function – matching what is in each toolkit). These are made available on the internet for non-VA users who may be interested in the IntegratedEthics concept.

On the intranet we have links to primers, entire toolkits, separate files for each tool, several formats for each of the tools (including some fillable forms), the Facility Workbook, information on the IntegratedEthics Staff Survey, IntegratedEthics videos, IE Technical Assistance calls, IE in Action, signup pages for the listservs, direct access to the online IE learning modules, a link to ECWeb, support material for VISN POCs, links to VISN LEAD training, and information on the IE performance measures. In other words, the tools you need to help you perform your IE role.

If I forget to bookmark the intranet site, how do I know whether I am on the internet or intranet site?

The best clues for immediately knowing whether you are on internet or intranet:

- The top banner on the intranet site has the word "intranet" immediately above Department of Veterans Affairs.

- On the left navigation bar the flyout for IntegratedEthics on the internet site has only 2 items (IE materials is the top link), while on the intranet site there are 10 IE flyouts (IEPO is the top link).

- There is a link to the Encyclopedia of Bioethics on the intranet home page.

Refer to *Figure 2* on the following page.

Are there any other differences between the internet and intranet sites?

The password to the Encyclopedia of Bioethics website is posted on the intranet but not internet. Under our licensing agreement only VA staff are allowed free access to this resource.

What other items are available on the Center website?

The Center is VHA's primary office for addressing the complex ethical issues that arise in patient care, health care management, and research. We serve as a resource center for VHA leaders and staff on issues in clinical, organizational, and research ethics. Resources include:

- **National Ethics Committee reports.** The Committee is responsible for providing guidance on pressing ethical issues of concern to VHA through concise, readable reports for VHA clinicians, managers, and researchers. NEC reports clarify issues of concern to VHA to guide ethical decision making; provide timely, practical information and recommendations; and reflect VHA's commitment to excellence in health care ethics.

- **Ethics Policy.** The Center is responsible for developing several VHA policies in health care ethics including Informed Consent for Clinical Treatments & Procedures (VHA Handbook 1004.1), Advance Care Planning and Management of Advance Directives (VHA Handbook 1004.2), State-Authorized Portable Orders (VHA Handbook 1004.04), Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Protocols within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VHA Handbook 1004.3), and Disclosure of Adverse Events to Patients (VHA Directive 2008-002). Links to these policies are on the website.

- **National Ethics Teleconferences (NET)** address selected topics in health care ethics. These calls provide education and offer an

Figure 2. Compare the look and feel of the INTRANET site (right) to the INTERNET depicted on the left.

opportunity for practitioners and others throughout VHA to discuss an important health care ethics issue.

- **Publications.** Two **publications** issued periodically by the Center, *IN fOCUS* and *Ethics Rx*, provide substantive analysis of topics in health care ethics.

- **Discussion of special topics**, such as the ethical issues in **Pandemic Influenza** Preparedness and Response.

- **Links to selected non-VA ethics resources.** On the **Ethics Resources page** we have links to the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, PubMed, ETHXWeb, and the American Medical Association Policy Finder.

  - The *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* provides valuable information on topics and issues in health care ethics.

  - PubMed is a service of the US National Library of Medicine that includes over 18 million citations from MEDLINE and other life science journals for biomedical articles dating back to the 1950s.

  - ETHXWeb is a searchable database of journal articles, book chapters, bills, laws, court decisions, reports, books, audiovisuals, and news articles relating to bioethics and professional ethics.

  - The AMA Policy Finder is a searchable database of AMA policies as well as opinions interpreting the AMA Code of Medical Ethics.

The Ethics Resources page also has links to all material found on the Center website, sorted by ethics domain and topic. You will also find links to related material from several non-VA sources. ✍

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ETHICS
in Health Care