

Integrated Ethics *in Action*

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BEYOND THE WORKSHOP: FIVE ATTENDEES SHARE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES GAINED FROM THE ETHICS CONSULTATION BEYOND THE BASICS WORKSHOPS

In 2008, recognizing a need for more in-depth ethics consultation training, the National Center for Ethics in Health Care (Ethics Center) developed a one-and-a-half day program, *Ethics Consultation Beyond the Basics (BtB) Workshop*. Since then, the workshop has been presented six times throughout the country, attended by 172 ethics consultants from 128 VHA facilities and all 21 VISNs.

The workshop's primary purpose was to provide active and experienced ethics consultants with an opportunity to expand their skills and knowledge in a hands-on setting. Other objectives included helping participants become more familiar with IE concepts and tools, and building a community of ethics consultants and champions. To what end? To work toward improving overall ethics quality in VHA health care.

Each workshop was divided into six distinct modules that included breakout activities. (See the sidebar for module contents.) Each module concentrated on key knowledge, skills, and practices designed to help ethics consultants address common challenges. While the workshops were not specifically designed to be a train-the-trainer program, participants were encouraged to share their workshop experience and materials with other ethics consultants at their facility.

IE *in Action* staff recently asked attendees to describe their impressions of the workshop and how it has supported the work of their facility's ethics consultation service. Five participants addressed how the workshop helped them.

What was your overall experience of the Beyond the Basics (BtB) workshop?

Overall, participants reported that the workshop not only expanded their understanding of the ethics consultant's role, but also reinforced what they already knew. "I

think we do a lot of things correctly, and the workshop was one way to get affirmation," said **Chaplain Jack Klugh (VAMC Fargo, ND)**. **Alicia Weatherbee, M.S.W., L.C.S.W. (VAMC Lexington, KY)**, said the workshop provided "practical learning." She continued, "It allowed us to practice the tools we needed to be more comfortable handling consults."

Workshop attendees also appreciated the opportunity to network with other consultants from their VISN. "We shared how each facility is doing things similarly and differently," Ms. Weatherbee said. "For example, we learned that there are different ways to organize a consult team. In some facilities, one person carries the ethics pager for a month and then responds to requests by forming a core team of two others. In other facilities, whole teams would be on call for each month."

Moreover, participants learned that ethics consults can address more than concerns arising in the course of patient care. "Before going to this workshop, the door into our ethics consult service was narrow, because we handled clinical cases only," said Chaplain Klugh. "Now, we have a garage door. Our service can be asked to help with anything that has an ethical piece, including educational and historical issues."

At the same time, however, participants were taught how to identify situations that fall outside the purview of the ethics consultation service. "Sometimes we'll get calls to handle something that, for instance, is a legal issue, not an ethical dilemma," said Ms. Weatherbee. "But we still want to be helpful and direct the person to the right place."

How have you incorporated content from the BtB workshop to improve ethics quality at your facility?

Participants found the modules very valuable for advancing their thinking about ethics and the role of the ethics consultation service. "Module 2 [see sidebar] helped us formulate the ethics question that is so crucial in responding to a consult," said Chap-

lain Klugh. “You have to know the values and what’s in conflict in order to adequately meet the needs of the folks who are making the request.”

Several attendees discussed how the information-gathering strategies discussed in Module 3 have since helped them prepare for a consult. “Since the workshop, our lead consultants have used the internet to locate needed knowledge for ethics analysis,” said

Jianming Xie, M.D.
(VAMC Martinsburg, WV). **Gwendolyn M. Sanders, M.S.W., L.C.S.W.**

(G.V. Sonny Montgomery VAMC, Jackson, MS), concurs. “The information from the training has helped me to identify search engines to broaden my knowledge about particular subjects that ultimately assist the team in making the best recommendation to our patients, their families, and to our colleagues.”

Participants also learned that they can partner with their medical library staffs for research help. “Our librarian is more than willing to help us do literature searches, and is an expert in quickly finding the information we need to respond to a consult,” said Ms. Weatherbee.

Further, the workshop provided empowering knowledge for conducting the actual consults, especially with regard to constructing effective claims and counterclaims, and running the formal meeting. “The training really helped me to assert myself in formal meetings,” Chaplain Klugh explained. “On my team there is almost a fear of giving a counterclaim to a heavily opinionated doctor who wants something to go a certain way. But you can ask physicians to reveal the sources for their claims. This training showed me that my role was to make sure the microphone was shared between all parties.”

How have you shared information you learned with your colleagues?

All participants interviewed mentioned that they discussed the workshop with leaders, team members, and other staff at their facilities. Many have since copied the

workshop materials for broader distribution. However, most importantly, they had already conducted (or were planning) more formal educational activities to share BtB workshop content:

Cynthia Sutter, Ethics Consultation Coordinator (VA Salt Lake City, UT, HCS):

“We have used some of the units to educate our consultation service team members and have asked workshop attendees to present at staff meetings. We are also planning a one-and-a-half day training for the VISN ethics consulta-

tion and PE team members, using TBI [traumatic brain injury] as a clinical focus for ethics education.”

Dr. Xie: “We gave a one-day workshop on December 10th to members of our bioethics committee where we went through all six modules.”

Ms. Sanders: “We are planning a retreat that will enable our service to become more efficient at answering ethics questions and expanding our knowledge base.”

Ms. Weatherbee: “A chaplain that I met at the BtB workshop and I are planning a similar workshop to be held at Lexington VAMC in April (09) for VISN 9 ethics consult team members.”

Chaplain Klugh: “I’ve conducted two trainings with my teams, where I acquainted new people with the CASES approach and EC-Web, and discussed the four ethical principles (justice, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and autonomy). I’ve also given one lecture so far to physicians about decision-making capacity. Soon, I hope to do a second on the ethical perspectives of informed consent.”

In what ways did the BtB training support and encourage collaborations with colleagues and leaders who are involved in other aspects of the IntegratedEthics program?

Participants indicated that the workshops helped them to better understand how the parts of IE fit together. “I can now, for example, more readily identify when something’s a preventive ethics issue,” said Ms. Weatherbee.

Workshop participants had already conducted (or were planning) more formal educational activities in their facility to share BtB workshop content.

“The workshop gave me more grounded knowledge about IE as a whole.”

Chaplain Klugh agreed. “In my opinion, in every ethics consult, I believe there is some aspect that’s a systems problem,” he said. “The content of Module 5 [see sidebar] helped me to know how to hand things off.” Rather than ignoring these systems issues, Chaplain Klugh indicated that the facility’s preventive ethics team could look into the problem.

In summary, the BtB workshop not only empowered ethics consultants with the knowledge needed to be more effective, it also gave them an opportunity to share and learn from colleagues — an experience that could not have been replicated in an online forum. The workshop also reinforced that consultants will continue to be supported in their work by Dr. Kenneth Berkowitz and his colleagues at the Ethics Center. “The training was a force-multiplier for me,” said Chaplain Klugh. “My confidence came with realizing other people struggle with the same things I do. I can now jump out there and take the lead of the ethics consultation service at my facility, knowing that I have back-up. I returned from the training with a game plan for how I can help our consultants gain further skills and knowledge. I can now duplicate myself.”



ETHICS CONSULTATION: BEYOND THE BASICS WORKSHOP MODULES*

MODULE 1: PREEMPT COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF AN ETHICS CONSULTANT

- Identify common misperceptions about the role of ethics consultants
- Discuss and practice techniques to effectively communicate an accurate role description of ethics consultants

MODULE 2: CLARIFY THE VALUES UNCERTAINTIES OR CONFLICTS GIVING RISE TO THE ETHICS CONSULTATION REQUEST

- Identify the values in a given ethics consultation

- Translate these values in a practical and understandable manner
- Discuss and practice tools and techniques that will clarify these values

MODULE 3: FIND THE AVAILABLE ETHICS KNOWLEDGE RELEVANT TO AN ETHICS QUESTION

- Describe ethics knowledge and how it applies to the ethics consultation
- Discuss and practice tools and techniques to gather ethics knowledge resources

MODULE 4: CONSTRUCT EFFECTIVE CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS

- Compare and contrast claims and counterclaims relevant to an ethics question
- Define categories of claims
- Discuss and practice tools and techniques to construct effective claims and counterclaims

MODULE 5: IDENTIFY UNDERLYING SYSTEMS ISSUES IN ETHICS CONSULTATION

- Address the relevance of systems thinking to ethics consultation
- Discuss and practice tools and techniques that will help identify the underlying systems issues
- Review ECWeb Report to identify underlying systems issues

MODULE 6: USE THE BEGINNING OF A FORMAL MEETING TO DEFUSE CONFLICT

- Identify elements of a formal meeting
- Review beginning a formal meeting process
- Discuss and practice tools and techniques to proactively manage conflict in a formal meeting

*Subject to change in subsequent releases of materials or presentations



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