

## FROM THE FIELD...

•South Texas Veterans Health Care System offers ethics certificate seminar.

•Portland VAMC runs unique program to deal with difficult patients.

To find out more go to:  
[www.va.gov/vhaethics/field4.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/field4.cfm)



Has your EAC developed a special task force or policy you want to share? Let us know at [vhaethics@med.va.gov](mailto:vhaethics@med.va.gov)

## IN THE LITERATURE...

Carney MT, Neugroschl J, Morrison RS, Marin D, Siu AL. The development and piloting of a capacity assessment tool. *J Clin Ethics*. 2001;12:17-24.

Burton SL, Randel L, Titlow K, Emanuel EJ. The ethics of pharmaceutical benefit management. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2001;20:150-163.

American Geriatrics Society Ethics and Research Committees. The responsible conduct of research. *JAGS*. 2001; 49:1120-1122.

To read abstracts of each of these articles go to: [www.va.gov/vhaethics/literature4.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/literature4.cfm)



## ON OUR WEB SITE...

### Recent additions to our Web site:

The educational materials, PowerPoint slides, and handouts from our 2001 annual Intensive Ethics Training program are now available for those with VA Intranet access at: [vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/education\\_2\\_1.cfm](http://vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/education_2_1.cfm). Also, we would like to welcome Moana Akers; JoAnn Lorenzo, MPA; and Kate Stockhausen, PhD, who have recently joined the Center staff (see [www.va.gov/vhaethics/about\\_2.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/about_2.cfm)).

## spotlightevents

- Conference on Compliance and Business Integrity

The VHA Office of Compliance and Business Integrity, in conjunction with the Employee Education System, sponsored a conference on Compliance and Business Integrity in August 2001. National Center for Ethics staff member Michael Cantor, MD, JD gave a presentation entitled "Gaming the System." Dr. Cantor discussed the interrelationship of ethics programs and compliance programs and how VHA is creating ethics and compliance programs at the national, network and local levels. To review Dr. Cantor's slide presentation go to: [vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/Gaming.ppt](http://vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/Gaming.ppt)

- National Ethics Committee Report Accepted for Publication
- National Center for Ethics and Employee Education System Co-sponsor Annual Intensive Ethics Training in July
- Development of VISN-level Training on Integrated Ethics Programs

To read more about these events, visit: [www.va.gov/vhaethics/spotlight4.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/spotlight4.cfm)

## bestpractices

### The VA National Formulary

by Kate Cassidy, MA, BSN  
National Center for Ethics

Managed care systems use various means for allocating resources to covered enrollees. Such allocation decisions are sometimes explicit – e.g., certain individuals or services are excluded from coverage, or they may be implicit – e.g., resources are limited through inconvenience or unavailability. Distributing limited resources requires trade-offs; balancing criteria such as *individual need* and *equal share* may result in fewer individualized benefits in order to achieve more equitable access to care.

One strategy that managed care systems use to allocate resources is to control the range of drugs and other pharmacy products that are made available to their enrollees. This article highlights the Department of Veterans Affairs National Formulary (VANF) process as one example of how VA has attempted to ensure fair and rational allocation of health care resources through a systematic and explicit process on a national scale. The VANF may serve as a useful model for other organizations facing similar challenges.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest system of managed care and the largest health care delivery



system in the US. VHA is a comprehensive, centrally managed health care system with a defined population of veteran enrollees. As with any managed care system, conflicting goals create tensions between standardization vs. flexibility, cost control vs. adequate access, and meeting needs equally for all vs. meeting individual needs.

For an ethical analysis of the VANF as a *best practices* model of resource allocation, visit our Web site at: [www.va.gov/vhaethics/best4.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/best4.cfm)



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- **Ethics Rounds:** September 11

## about the center

The National Center for Ethics is VHA's primary office for addressing the complex ethical issues that arise in patient care, health care management, and research. Founded in 1991, the Center is a field-based national program that is administratively located in the Office of the Under Secretary for Health. To learn more go to: [www.va.gov/vhaethics](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics)

## our mission

The mission of the National Center for Ethics is to clarify and promote ethical health care practices within VHA and beyond.



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Send us your

## feedback

Please send any questions, comments, address changes, or requests to be removed from our mailing list to the address above, or e-mail us at [vhaethics@med.va.gov](mailto:vhaethics@med.va.gov).

[www.va.gov/vhaethics](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics)

## New Web-based Ethics Course

The National Center for Ethics and the Employee Education System are pleased to introduce **Ethics in Managed Care**, a Web-based interactive learning program for health care professionals. Continuing education credits will be granted to qualified VHA staff who complete all of the program's requirements. Staff with VA Intranet access can take this course at: [vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/managed\\_care/splash.cfm](http://vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/managed_care/splash.cfm)

## New Hampshire Public Radio Interview

Paul Reitemeier, PhD, a health care ethicist on the staff of the National Center for Ethics, was interviewed about the Center and VHA ethics for a daily New Hampshire Public Radio program called The Front Porch. Dr. Reitemeier's segment, entitled "Medical Ethics in the VA System," aired on December 19, 2001. To hear the interview, go to: [http://www.nhpr.org/content/fullmonty\\_view.php/2272/](http://www.nhpr.org/content/fullmonty_view.php/2272/)

## Creation of the President's Council on Bioethics

On November 28, 2001, President Bush created the President's Council on Bioethics to study the ethical and social ramifications of new developments in biomedical science and technology, and to advise the President on bioethical issues. The Council is chaired by Dr. Leon Kass of the University of Chicago, with members to be appointed by the President. For more information please see: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011128-13.html>



**Ellen Fox, MD**  
Director, National Center for Ethics

## a word from:

This issue of [news@vhaethics](mailto:news@vhaethics) is devoted to ethical issues in managed care. VHA has adopted many managed care principles in an effort to continuously improve the quality, safety, and cost effectiveness of health care for veterans.

In this issue, the *Best Practices* article by Kate Cassidy examines VA's National Formulary system as a model of ethical and efficient resource allocation. The article by William Nelson, our National Education Coordinator, introduces the Center's exciting new online education course, *Ethics in Managed Care*. The *Legal Briefs* article by Jeffrey Oak, VHA Compliance and Business Integrity Officer, discusses documentation and its complex

relationship with compliance and ethics.

Finally, in place of our usual *Ethics Rounds* column, we have included some reflections about fundamental values in the wake of September 11. On behalf of the National Center for Ethics staff, I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound grief for those who were lost and our deepest gratitude to those whose selflessness and strength serve as a model for us all.

[www.va.gov/vhaethics](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics)

## Ethics in Managed Care: Web-based Learning



The use of managed care principles in VHA has the potential for improving the quality of care while containing costs. However, managed care systems raise ethical concerns unlike those seen in other types of health care delivery systems. For example, ethical concerns arise when managers and clinicians must balance their obligations to the individual patient against their obligations to the system. Clinicians in a managed care system are not solely fiduciaries responsible for the health of their individual patients, but they are also responsible for the health of a population of enrollees. They are stewards of the managed care system's resources in the sense that they must consider how their decisions relating to individual patients affect other

patients as well as the financial viability of the managed care system as a whole.

Clinical practice guidelines are a tool commonly used in managed care to improve the quality of care by defining what treatments are effective and by reducing variations in practice. These guidelines are based on research evidence in the published literature and, sometimes, expert opinion as to the most appropriate care for a given diagnosis in a particular patient group. Some clinical practice guidelines also identify and discourage the use of ineffective interventions.

Conflicts can arise when a clinician disagrees with the treatment specified in a guideline. The clinician may believe, for example, that a different, possibly more expensive treatment is justified for a particular patient. What should clinicians do in this situation, given their responsibilities as both fiduciary and steward?

To learn more about resolving ethical issues in managed care and the Center's Web-based CME course, go to: [vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/nec4.cfm](http://vawww.va.gov/vhaethics/nec4.cfm)



## legalbriefs



## Integrating Documentation, Compliance, and Ethics

by Jeffrey Oak, PhD  
VHA Compliance and Business Integrity Officer

An important change in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the new emphasis on obtaining reimbursement from insurance companies and veterans with non-service connected conditions. In the introduction to a new video for senior clinical and administrative leaders about compliance and business integrity, VA Secretary Anthony J.

Principi states that in order to achieve its mission of service to veterans, VA needs to collect all of the third-party dollars to which it is entitled, "no more, and certainly no less." This emphasis on new initiatives to increase collections raises important

ethical issues for VA. Increasing attention to documentation, coding, and billing, which are the basis for accurate collections, should not undermine important values or shift the focus away from caring for veterans.

In the past, VA was not expected to recover money from third-party insurers or veterans, and therefore had the luxury of not having to worry so much about documentation and billing. That is no longer the case – Congress now expects VA to recover all the money it is entitled to from insurers as well as certain veterans. Recovering money owed is now an important part of VA's responsibility as a steward of taxpayer dollars.

For further discussion and ethical analysis of the need for documentation, coding, and billing in VA, see our Web site at: [www.va.gov/vhaethics/briefs4.cfm](http://www.va.gov/vhaethics/briefs4.cfm)



## ethics rounds

### September 11

by Ellen Fox, MD  
Director, National Center for Ethics

This is a painful and challenging time. Recent events have forced us to reexamine some of our most fundamental values. As we struggle to make sense of this changing world, many of us have been motivated to focus more on what is truly important and meaningful in our lives.

We can find solace in many ways. Just as death and destruction can lead to reexamination and renewal, hatred and

violence can inspire love and compassion. Already, heartache and despair seem to be giving way to hope, healing, and celebration of the human spirit.

How September 11 and all that has followed will change America is ultimately up to us. My hope is that, as Americans, as public servants, and as health care professionals, we will remain true to the values we hold most dear. In the words of Anne Frank:

In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death... I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet,

if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come out right, that this cruelty will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

We invite you to join in a conversation about our fundamental values by participating in our "September 11" WebBoard discussion group. If you need more information or help, please visit [vawww.va.gov/ethicsrounds4.cfm](http://vawww.va.gov/ethicsrounds4.cfm) for links to many useful resources.

