



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420**

IL 10-2007-008

In Reply Refer To: 10E

April 12, 2007

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

**ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CLINICIANS AND SURROGATE DECISION MAKERS**

1. This Veterans Health Administration Information Letter provides clinicians and managers with information about ethical issues in the relationship between clinicians and surrogate decision makers.
2. When patients are not able to make health care decisions themselves, VHA clinicians look to surrogates to make decisions for them. A new report by VHA's National Ethics Committee, Ethical Aspects of the Relationship between Clinicians and Surrogate Decision Makers:
 - a. Discusses the surrogate's role and responsibilities;
 - b. Examines prevailing ethical standards for surrogate decision making;
 - c. Explores the nature of the clinician-surrogate relationship; and
 - d. Recommends specific clinical practices to promote shared decision making and foster collaborative relationships with surrogates.
3. To ensure that practitioners throughout the VHA system are familiar with the ethical aspects of surrogate decision making and the clinician-surrogate relationship, clinicians and managers are encouraged to review this report and implement its recommendations.
4. The report is available from the National Center for Ethics in Health Care at:
<http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/pubs/necreports.asp>
5. Questions about the report may be directed to Ellen Fox, MD (10E), Director, National Center for Ethics in Health Care, at (202) 501-0364.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Acting Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 4/13/07
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 4/13/07