



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Veterans Health Administration  
Washington DC 20420

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**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS THAT ARISE WHEN A HOME CARE PATIENT  
ON LONG TERM OXYGEN THERAPY CONTINUES TO SMOKE**

1. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Information Letter provides clinicians and managers with information about ethical considerations that arise when a home care patient on long-term oxygen therapy (LTOT) continues to smoke.
2. Many patients receiving LTOT at home continue to smoke despite the increased risk of fire. A new report by VHA's National Ethics Committee, *Ethical Considerations That Arise When a Home Care Patient on Long Term Oxygen Therapy Continues to Smoke*, examines four issues relevant to the question of whether to provide home-based LTOT to these patients. They are:
  - a. The risks of smoking on LTOT in relation to the benefits;
  - b. The moral and legal responsibility, for any subsequent harm from fire, of clinicians who provides oxygen to a patient;
  - c. The ethical requirements for providing LTOT to smokers; and
  - d. The conditions under which the risk of fire justifies denying or withdrawing LTOT.
3. This report offers specific guidance for practitioners who prescribe, provide, or otherwise work with patients on LTOT, as well as to committees that may have to consider termination of LTOT. To ensure that practitioners throughout the VHA system are familiar with the ethical considerations that arise when a home care patient on LTOT continues to smoke, 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>

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