



Spotlight

ON EXCELLENCE

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Taking 10E to the Next Level of Excellence: Our Operational Goals Committees



FY19 was a pivotal year for the Office of Organizational Excellence (OE). We played a vital role in starting VHA's official journey toward becoming a High Reliability Organization (HRO) and continue to help steer the course through the National Center for Patient Safety and Systems Redesign and Improvement. The Office of Compliance and Business Integrity championed the development and launch of VHA's first-ever [Code of Integrity](#) and the National Center for Ethics in Health Care was honored with the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities Cornerstone Award. Through our 10E workgroups, we sponsored numerous field-based workshops, bootcamps, and training academies. We also convened a series of virtual information gathering sessions to get field input about the Three Lines of Defense. And, of course, we were fortunate to add Drs. David Chiesa and Joel Roos to our leadership roster. It was against this backdrop of

transformation and achievement that Organizational Excellence, through its four operational goals committees, continued charting its journey toward excellence. [See the list below.] Established at the 2018 OE Senior Retreat (and highlighted in last Fall's Spotlight on Excellence [newsletter](#)), the four committees worked diligently to better define our goals as a program office, promote a just culture, inventory our collective resources, and identify ways to reconnect with the field.

Under Dr. Tamara Box's leadership, the **Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities** committee focused on the functions of individual OE workgroups, including each workgroup's alignment with the Offices of Integrity and Quality, Safety and Value. To help VHA staff outside OE understand who we are and what we do, the committee

RESOURCES

OE Website
<https://www.va.gov/healthcareexcellence/>

OE Intranet
<http://vawww.oe.rtp.med.va.gov/>

OE Sharepoint
<https://vawww.rtp.portal.va.gov/OQSV/SitePages/Home.aspx>

Clarifying Roles & Responsibilities

Dr. Tami Box, Director, Office of Clinical Systems Development and Evaluation

Knowledge Management

Mr. Mike Harrelson, Director, Health Systems Innovation Planning and Coordination

Improving Oversight without Eroding Trust

Mr. Vince Reed, Executive Director, High Reliability Systems and Consultation

Supporting Quality Professionals in the Field

Dr. (Bradley) Vince Watts, Director, Systems Redesign and Improvement

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created a summary of mission and value statements for all OE programs, explored the differences between “program offices” and “services,” and completed a survey of all OE programs. The survey examined the roles and responsibilities defined in the VHA Governance Integrated Project Team (IPT), and the focus and workload of each OE program.

With an eye toward our everyday work environment, the **Improving Oversight without Eroding Trust** committee focused on the role a just culture plays in HROs. Led by Mr. Vince Reed, the workgroup studied our organization’s oversight methods and training to maintain a culture of trust. They focused on ways to foster and promote a cordial and cooperative environment.

To get a sense of OE’s collective resources, the **Systematic Knowledge Management** workgroup successfully created a knowledge management action plan for OE, a resource portal, a content review checklist, and a service to provide website/SharePoint design consultation. Their work, guided by Mr. Mike Harrelson, is fundamental to ensuring more effective communication from 10E, as well as related program offices, to the field.

In fact, their work is interconnected with the efforts of the **Supporting Quality Professionals in the Field** committee, which endeavored to help OE program

offices communicate and coordinate their support of quality management field staff. This committee, led by Dr. Bradley “Vince” Watts, helped bring together VISN Quality Management Officers by hosting a three-day face-to-face meeting where multiple offices provided briefings and trainings.

Because of the committees’ work, 10E has renewed ties with quality managers in the field, developed a shared understanding of 10E workgroup roles and responsibilities, and created an action plan to help each workgroup catalogue and share many best practices, data, and resources VHA-wide. By advancing the highest standards of care, innovation, responsible stewardship, and ethical practice within VHA, we are acknowledging a deeper understanding of our privilege to care for Veterans.

Our journey towards excellence, however, is ongoing, and we still have much work to do in FY2020.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities will continue to focus on understanding gaps between OE offices and the VHA Governance IPT’s vision and whether those gaps are appropriate. They will also identify if steps to remediate are necessary or if those gaps represent opportunities for growth and better collaboration (e.g., improved VISN-level integration or increased opportunities to engage in oversight). **Improving Oversight Without Eroding Trust**

hopes to increase the awareness of the concepts of Just Culture, Three Lines of Defense, performance vs compliance auditing, and how all of these can be best leveraged in attaining and sustaining high reliability. And while **Knowledge Management’s** task has been successfully completed, work in 2020 will be done by key stakeholders across OE to review all VHA-facing websites and SharePoint sites and to implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure web content review is completed at appropriate intervals moving forward. Finally, **Supporting Quality Professionals** in the field will expand its engagement with the Quality Management Officer group to develop better training and resources for new (or potential) Quality Management Officers.

As VHA’s transformation towards becoming an HRO continues, much can be learned from our four operational goals committees: knowledge consolidation, coordination, and organization; increased training for field staff; organizational growth and collaboration through role clarification; and building trust through improved oversight processes. Both individually and collectively, these committees have provided a superb foundation upon which to build, and the means to further strengthen our commitment to promoting high quality health care for Veterans. ♦

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Leadership Q&A:

Dr. David Chiesa, ADUSH for Office of Integrity

Dr. Joel Roos, ADUSH for Office of Quality, Safety and Value

Dr. David Chiesa and Dr. Joel Roos joined 10E within weeks of one another. Dr. Chiesa, ADUSH for Integrity, and dentist by profession, spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force Dental Corps, retiring at the rank of colonel. Dr. Roos, ADUSH for QSV, is an emergency physician and healthcare executive, who retired from the U.S. Navy after 30 years at the rank of captain. As Veterans, military medicine leaders, and now VHA senior leaders, Dr. Chiesa and Dr. Roos share much in common, including their first several weeks onboarding at VA at the same time.

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Recently, *Spotlight on Excellence* met with these two leaders to get their thoughts and perspective as newcomers to the organization. The result was a lively, interactive discussion about VHA, how it compares to private sector healthcare, and ways to improve the organization. Below is an excerpt from that interview.

Spotlight: Thank you for joining us today, Dr. Chiesa and Dr. Roos, and welcome to VA. Now that you've been at VHA for a few months, and have had a chance to settle into your new positions, what opportunities do you see for improvement in VA?

Roos: We are a three-level organization that is not completely streamlined for efficiency. A more ideal division of responsibility would be strategy, operations, and execution among the three levels, which we don't quite have here in VA. A lot of responsibility sits at the VISN level. I believe one of the goals of our streamlining effort is to improve the ability of VACO to set strategy and provide the necessary resources and support for the VISNs and medical facilities to execute. We currently have overlapping functions.

Chiesa: I think this helps answer the question "what do the VISNs do?" They do a lot, actually. But their strategic, operational and tactical levels are very blurred.

Roos: I believe this might be one benefit of former military personnel working in the VA, as they are used to operating in this type of system. Personally, I was actually surprised there was not a higher percentage of Veterans working within VA.

Chiesa: Definitely heavily weighted in favor of former Army and Navy, of course. {laughter}

Roos: Definitely!

Chiesa: What I see in a lot of the reports that I review, such as GAO, OIG, Whistleblower, is that we have a lot of work ahead of us.

But I tell the OIG that my job is to put you out of business. People are afraid to speak up. We need to change that culture and remove that fear. To change the culture that people don't want to come forward and say something about what is going wrong. In the thirty minutes we've been talking, there have been 21,000 visits to our facilities and that is humbling and energizing for me at the same time.

Roos: I agree. I am motivated by challenge and the ability to do cool stuff. I've never been motivated by money. And it was actually a more personal decision to come work for the VA, as my son is an Army Infantry Officer. I want to improve the quality and safety of care that he and his generation of Veterans will receive. This is the right place for me to make an impact and hopefully effect lasting change.

Spotlight: What do you think private sector healthcare can learn from VA healthcare?

Roos: This question could also be asked the other way around. There are lessons for both sides but streamlining efforts is certainly one of the ways VA can learn from the private sector. Some of the data and analytic functions here at the VA are superb and would benefit the private sector. The fact that we



Dr. David Chiesa, ADUSH for Office of Integrity



Dr. Joel Roos, ADUSH for Office of Quality, Safety and Value

are not focused on profit allows more opportunities since we have a mission-focused culture, similar to DoD.

Chiesa: We are identical twins on that answer. You can never stop learning. It's learning from each other – both good and bad. I would always say to my command that I'm going to be a great leader because you are either going to learn what to do or what not to do from me. It is impressive we are able to follow a Veteran around and know their entire history and meet their needs. It is very hard for the private sector to do that.

Roos: To some degree the private sector does not care. I do not mean they don't care about patients as individuals, but if there is not enough demand in a geographic area the private sector isn't going to bother with it. We in the VA are mandated to provide care to all entitled, regardless of location.

Chiesa: Correct. We have mobile vans, telehealth, community care options and more.

Roos: It's certainly not cost effective for a private healthcare organization to focus on a small town or a farming community. Big private sector healthcare is going to focus on where the money is, which is not a driver for the VA.

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Chiesa: Because our standards are very high, our customer service is very high; usually it is statistically significantly higher than the private sector.

Roos: And VACO customer service is just as good as some of the customer service at our individual facilities.

Chiesa: It is also good to see our centers as a social place for Veterans. They go to meet, talk and reminisce about old times. You don't see that in private sector centers. It is part of the healing process for them. We have over 73,000 volunteers, many of them Veterans or from Veterans' families as well. My wife is a nurse and volunteers there, and we try to get our daughter to volunteer, as well. It is a really great thing to see and fosters that camaraderie.

VA employees can read the full interview with Dr. David Chiesa and Dr. Joel Roos [\[intranet link\]](#). ♦

Excellence in Action: A Renewed Commitment to Safety

High reliability in healthcare means fewer accidents or harmful events, despite operating in a highly complex, high-risk environment. The American health care industry has been behind the curve in adopting High Reliability Organization (HRO) principles but is aspiring to change. Preventable medical errors rank behind heart disease and cancer as the third leading cause of death in the United States. HROs avoid harm to patients and staff by becoming proficient in the three pillars of High Reliability (Leadership Commitment, a Culture of Safety, and Continuous Process Improvement). HROs ensure that their employees understand and follow the high reliability principles and values that guide the journey to a safer environment.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) benefits from a rich history of process improvement and patient focus and wants to do more to improve patient safety. To this end, in February 2019, under Dr. Stone's leadership and guidance, VHA began our HRO journey toward excellent care for every patient, every time.

Training, coaching, and other implementation activities are supporting medical centers in their HRO transformation. Employees receive monthly HRO newsletters, safety posters, blogs, and podcasts describing HRO principles and values via email. An internal SharePoint site was created to share HRO information, updates, communication tools, and provide feedback mechanisms. Veterans Health Administration Central Office (VHACO) leadership has also helped deliver trainings.

Leadership for HRO comes from the top. Dr. Gerry Cox, Deputy Under Secretary of Health for Organizational Excellence, taught leadership classes covering HRO Principles and Pillars to Senior Executive Service personnel at VHA Central Office. Dr. Cox

conducted these trainings in two virtual sessions and two face-to-face sessions. "Assuring that senior leaders receive complementary training to the training received by VA Medical Center staff is critical to changing our culture," explains Dr. Cox.

Another senior executive, Dr. Joel Roos, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Quality, Safety and Value, was integral in the idea creation and development of training videos that share leading practices within VHA facilities. Dr. Roos noted that, "Once distributed, these videos have great potential in expanding best practices throughout the enterprise."



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The National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) is supporting VA's HRO journey through several trainings, assessments, and monitoring and evaluations. At each lead site, there has been a great deal of qualitative data collection, including on-site interviews and HRO diagnostic assessments, including continuous process improvement and patient safety elements. NCPS has conducted:

- » Clinical Team Training (CTT) to prospective VISN and facility CTT trainers
- » Just Culture training to HRO Lead Site leadership and VHACO leadership
- » Coordination of a monthly National HRO conference call with VISN HRO work groups
- » Tracking and monitoring of patient safety adverse events,
- » Close calls, and serious safety events across the enterprise
- » Evaluation of facility and VISN patient safety culture through the All Employee Survey in collaboration with NCOD

"This data sharing and strong practice implementation among VHA facilities is critical to changing VHA culture," says Dr. William Gunnar, Executive Director, NCPS.

The VHA Office of Systems Redesign and Improvement is supporting VA's HRO journey and leading the way in Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) through the VHA HRO Collaborative, an Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI)-based national improvement initiative. The Collaborative is engaging all the HRO

lead sites, with two improvement project teams per site, as well as representation from all VISN offices. Leigh Starr, Acting Deputy Director of the Office of Systems Redesign and Improvement, and one of the Directors of the Collaborative, along with Dr. Joan Clifford from Bedford VA Medical Center and Dr. Julie Flynn from the VA South Texas Health Care System, explained that "VHA has been focused on high reliability principles for quite some time through the Collaborative structure during more than a decade of past Collaboratives focused primarily on patient flow. The HRO Collaborative has given lead sites and their teams an opportunity to apply these principles, along with improvement strategies and tools, directly to improve patient safety at their facilities. The Collaborative is generating strong practices for sustainment and sharing across VHA." The third and final learning session of the HRO Collaborative is planned for December 10-12 in Charleston, SC.

In addition to the HRO Collaborative, the application of systems redesign and improvement strategies and the development of strong continuous process improvement programs is critical at both VAMC and VISN levels in support of high reliability. Members of the VHA Office of Systems Redesign and Improvement, along with engaged field experts, have visited all 18 HRO lead sites to partner with local improvement experts and leaders on diagnostic site visits. These visits focused on the development and sustainment of strong continuous process improvement programs that fuel and sustain the culture of improvement needed to support HRO long-term across VHA.

Standardized training curriculum, focused on the Lean improvement methodology as VHA's common framework for improvement, is also pending formal release to support VHA in strengthening process improvement broadly and in support of the HRO journey.

Another 54 VA facilities, three from each VISN, will launch official VHA HRO practices with the national journey in 2020, and the remaining sites will join in 2021. "We are confident we can become a VHA-wide, high-reliability organization because we *already* have facilities on the high reliability journey. We call this a journey because it does not have an end date. Our strengths as an HRO will continuously improve over time," Dr. Cox explains. ♦

High Reliability Organization

OUR PLEDGE

Your Care is Our Mission.

ASK ME ABOUT IT

- ✓ **It's About the Veteran**
- ✓ **Support a Safety Culture**
- ✓ **Commit to Zero Harm**
- ✓ **Learn, Inquire and Improve**
- ✓ **Duty to Speak Up**
- ✓ **Respect for People**
- ✓ **Clear Communications**

HRO Principles

Focus on Front Line Staff and Care Processes
Sensitivity to Operations

Anticipate Risk - Every Staff Member a Problem Solver
Preoccupation with Failure

Get to the Root Causes
Reluctance to Simplify

Bounce Back from Mistakes
Commitment to Resilience

Empower and Value Expertise and Diversity
Deference to Expertise




U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

Feature from the Field: Spreading the Word – VHA's Code of Integrity

Since its launch last spring, VHA's Code of Integrity has quickly become both a welcome resource as well as a standard for everyday conduct and behavior at VAMCs nationwide.

“The Code of Integrity is important for all of us because it speaks to honesty and truthfulness”, says Janet Thomas, a Compliance and Business Integrity Officer (CBIO) with the John J. Pershing VA Medical Center in Missouri.

In April 2019, VHA with support from the [Office of Compliance and Business Integrity](#) (CBI), the [Office of Integrity](#), and the Office of Organizational Excellence published the [Code of Integrity](#), also known as the “Code”, a first-of-its-kind document that sets the ethical standards and obligations for every VHA employee. The Code is centered around VA's ICARE values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence and provides high-level guidance regarding how VHA provides care to Veterans, conducts research, maintains financial records, and protects assets: all pillars of work at VHA.

The Code makes it easy for employees to quickly find resources and contact information for integrity related issues. The Code aligns to the values for VA becoming a High Reliability Organization (HRO): acknowledging employees' duty to speak up with concerns, creating an environment in which all are respected and valued, and fostering a just culture. The Code is not new – it simply brings together the

patchwork quilt of existing policy into one high-level umbrella document.

To help support the launch of the Code, CBIOs across the country led activities during Compliance and Ethics Week, an annual event jointly sponsored by CBI and the [National Center for Ethics in Health Care](#), both within the Office of Integrity. The event was held to draw attention to the importance of compliance and ethics and to help spread the word about the Code to staff. CBIOs created presentations, education sessions, scenarios, quizzes, and handouts to inform staff about the benefits of using the Code. Many compliance officers received overwhelming support from staff about having a Code of Integrity to reference.



When asked why having a Code of Integrity is important for VHA, Darren Mitzkavetch, CBIO with the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System shared, “We want and need to build a workplace around trust

and respect for all employees and our Veterans. We try and do this by communicating openly and honestly, being responsible for our behavior, working diligently while adhering to the VA's policies and leading by example.”

Veterans expect VHA to cultivate an environment where ethical conduct and personal accountability are encouraged. By promoting a just culture, VHA fosters an environment where employees are encouraged to inform their leaders of any challenge to success. ♦

What's Happening at OE

The Office of Organizational Excellence invites you to send your events, conferences and publications for inclusion in this quarterly calendar. Please email your information to VHA10EDUSHOE1@va.gov.

DECEMBER

VHA High Reliability Organization (HRO) Collaborative (Learning Session 3)
December 10-14
Charleston, SC

JANUARY

10E Leading Organizational Improvement course
Washington, DC
January 10

2019-2020 Improvement Advisor Academy
January 14-16
Long Beach, CA

10E Town Hall
January 23
Washington, DC and VANTS Line

FEBRUARY

Conversations with Leadership
February 6
Washington, DC and VANTS Line