



LETTER FROM THE CHIEF

*Erica M. Scavella, M.D., FACP, FACHE
Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Health*

Dear Colleagues,

Back in February of 2020, before we knew how much our lives would change over the next year, then-ADUSH Dr. David Chiesa corralled leaders from the offices of Compliance and Business Integrity, Internal Audit, the Office of the Medical Inspector, National Center for Ethics in Health Care, and Research Oversight together for a retreat. At what would be both our first and last in-person leadership gathering of 2020, we discussed the VHA transformation and re-organization that brought us all together. We noted where our work intersects and connects us, supporting VHA's mission to "honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being."

We began to work on what to call our new team. What might have seemed at first to be a simple administrative exercise—picking a name for our office—soon revealed itself to be both challenging and important. Our name would tell the outside world—including all of VHA, Veterans, caregivers, Congress, clinicians and other stakeholders—who we are, and why they should care. Even more important, it would define us to ourselves, and draw the parameters of what would unite us.

As you know, we decided to call ourselves the Office of Oversight, Risk and Ethics (ORE), which officially went into

ORE'S ROLE IN VA OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Office of Oversight, Risk and Ethics (ORE) is dedicated to supporting VHA's commitment to America's Veterans by providing coordinated, streamlined oversight across the agency. By implementing a unified oversight effort, ORE plays a key role in ensuring the integrity of VA healthcare. As Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Health (ADUSH) Dr. Erica Scavella said, "the oversight performed by ORE is collegial and

effect this month. We are united in our shared mission to improve VHA's organizational performance, efficiency and accountability through the dissemination of best practices related to organizational legal and regulatory risk, ethics and oversight and accountability activities.

In the last issue of Connection, we put the spotlight on risk, and how our team contributes to gathering and managing opportunities and threats across VHA. In this issue, we will focus on oversight—another word in the ORE name—and something each program office participates in, in big or small ways. Our oversight activities are essential to ensuring that we meet our mission to provide the very best healthcare to America's Veterans.

As always, thank you for your commitment to VHA's mission.

IN THE JUNE ISSUE

	Page
Letter from the Chief	1
ORE's Role in VA Oversight and Accountability	1
Introducing the New ORE SharePoint	2
Suspect it? Report it! Office of Integrity and Compliance Raises Awareness of Fraud, Waste and Abuse with National Campaign	3
Important Announcements	4

This newsletter is a quarterly publication of the Veterans Health Administration Office of Oversight, Risk and Ethics (ORE).

Story ideas can be submitted to: oreteamdis@disconsulting.com.

ORE'S ROLE IN VA OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

continued from page 1

charged with informing Dr. Scavella of risks affecting Veterans' health care and making recommendations to address those risks. ORE's offices of Internal Audit (IA) and Integrity and Compliance (OIC), as well as the office's Enterprise Risk Manager, present to the ARCC to provide the committee with broader understanding of agency-wide challenges.

ARCC provides VA and VHA Senior Leadership an executive-level forum for collaboration, communication, direction, solution evaluations and governance oversight regarding VHA risk and internal control. It also addresses the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) High Risk List Area of Concern related to inadequate oversight and accountability. The committee oversees VHA's clinical, administrative and business risks to make continuous improvements to the VA health care delivery system, while collaborating with other accountability organizations, including the Office of the Medical Inspector, Office of the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office. ARCC's objectives are to improve accountability, build trust with Veterans and improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of VHA's operations and delivery of health care.

Dr. Scavella explained, "The goal is for VHA leadership to be proactive in anticipating risks. We don't want to always be reacting to crisis after crisis—we want instead to have a response ready should a crisis occur." To support this agency-wide goal, ORE regularly conducts environmental scans to determine possible future threats to VHA, as well as continuing to manage risks that have already been identified. ORE's Office of the Medical Inspector also watches for issues with national implications in their inspections, feeding the risk conversation. All criminal issues are referred to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). ORE's Office of Research Oversight (ORO) identifies issues and risks related to VA's research activities. The National Center for Ethics in Healthcare (NCEHC) ensures ethical decision making across the agency.

"ORE works in partnership with our colleagues across VHA," added Dr. Scavella. "By working together with professionals in

the field, we can best assess risks across our agency to address areas for improvement—allowing us to be prepared for challenges we see coming."

"By working together with professionals in the field, we can best assess risks across our agency to address areas for improvement—allowing us to be prepared for challenges we see coming."

When the agency is prepared, the impact of risks on patient care can be mitigated. "A global pandemic was on the risk profile for VHA since the 2003 SARS epidemic and various flu outbreaks," Dr. Scavella said. "VA's response to the coronavirus pandemic was strong largely because leadership was well prepared."

To date, VA has conducted nearly 4 million COVID-19 tests and delivered at least one dose of a vaccine to more than 3 million people. In addition, VA was able to quickly ramp up tele-health when in-person contact was limited. For example, from March 1, 2020 to early June 2021, VA saw a 1,229% increase in in-home or off-site telehealth visits. [Source](#)

In terms of future risk, Dr. Scavella identifies ransomware as a potential problem on the horizon. "The Colonial Pipeline hack this spring underscored the threat of a future ransomware attack at VHA," she said. "It's important that VHA leadership knows what risk is there, so that we can develop a response before it happens."

"ORE's mission is to strengthen trust and confidence in the Veterans Health Care System by promoting ethics, accountability, and Just Culture" said Dr. Scavella. "Providing oversight of opportunities and threats across the system is key to living out that mission and improving the care and experience we can deliver to each and every Veteran."

INTRODUCING THE NEW ORE SHAREPOINT

The Office of Oversight, Risk and Ethics (ORE) launched a new [SharePoint site](#) this month to provide another line of communication to employees and a one stop shop for key information and resources. Currently, the site includes three main sections: About ORE, Onboarding for ORE Staff, and

Communications. Other features, like a list of upcoming ORE events and a log of ORE Weekly Update emails from Dr. Erica Scavella, Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Health, are also available on the site to help ORE employees stay informed and connected.

INTRODUCING THE NEW ORE SHAREPOINT

continued from page 2

ABOUT ORE

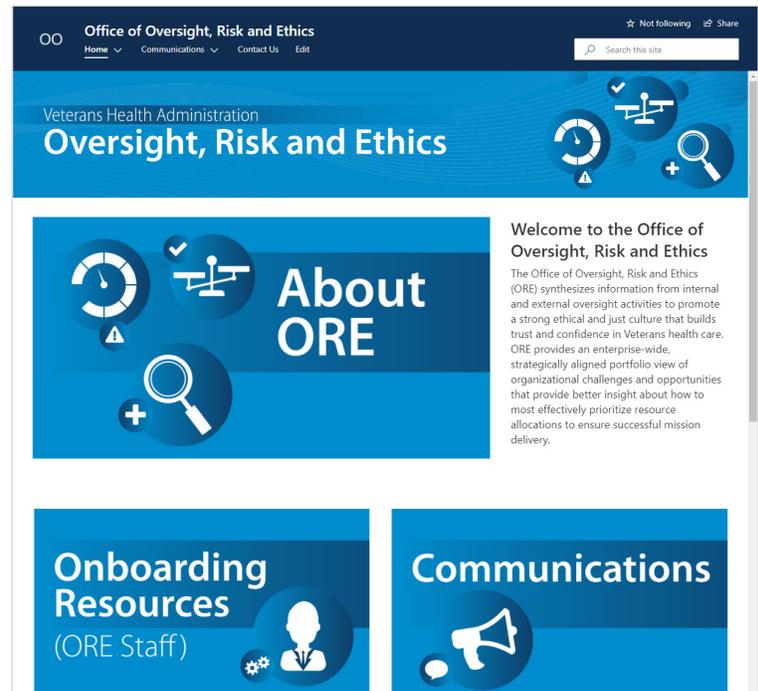
In the “About ORE” section, you can read the office’s Mission and Vision statements, as well as a brief description of each ORE program office with links to additional information on each. Get to know each office and learn more about the key projects that your colleagues are working on. This is also a great way to identify areas for future collaboration with other program offices doing similar work.

ONBOARDING FOR ORE STAFF

Employees, both new and seasoned, can now easily access helpful information like the VHA Code of Integrity, key policies and directives, the all-employee survey (AES) results and a quick list of required TMS trainings – all in one place. Over time, additional resources will continue to be added, including a new ORE Onboarding training deck and a list of useful contacts for common needs like PIV issues, help with remote (VPN) access, TMS support and more.

COMMUNICATIONS

The communications section will provide easy access to important ORE communications, such as the town hall recordings, past issues of the *CONNECTION* newsletter and videos from ORE program offices. If you ever need to refer back to these materials, they’ll always be right at your fingertips on the ORE SharePoint site.



ORE is excited to introduce this new resource and looks forward to continuing to build and expand on the current site to include additional resources over the coming months. Please take some time to explore the site and if you have feedback or suggestions, please feel free to reach out at: VHA10OREOversightRiskEthicsAction@va.gov.

SUSPECT IT? REPORT IT! OFFICE OF INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE RAISES AWARENESS OF FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE WITH NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Integrity is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) first [ICARE value](#). It is an important concern for VA employees every day but needs to be even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. A few bad actors are seeking to take advantage of Veterans and VA employees during this challenging time through fraud schemes and scams and other illegal or unethical activities that are defined as fraud, waste and abuse (FWA). This affects not just the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), but most health care systems across the country.

ORE’s Office of Integrity and Compliance (OIC) (formerly Office of Compliance and Business Integrity (CBI)) has launched a communications campaign to raise awareness about how to spot and report instances of FWA. According to OIC:

- **Fraud** involves attempting to gain something of value by intentionally misrepresenting a situation – fraud is intentional misconduct.
 - *Example:* VHA is intentionally overbilled for medical services or supplies for monetary gain.
- **Waste** is misusing money or resources, even if not explicitly illegal or intentional.
 - *Example:* VHA orders more medical supplies than it needs versus what it uses, resulting in a preventable loss.
- **Abuse** is behaving improperly or unreasonably or misusing one’s position or authority.
 - *Example:* Medical services or supplies are improperly prescribed or used by a medical practitioner.

SUSPECT IT? REPORT IT!

continued from page 3

“If a situation looks or feels wrong, trust your instincts,” says Tracy Davis Bradley, Ph.D., Acting Chief Integrity and Compliance Officer. “Employees that see something that doesn’t seem right should report it immediately.”

FWA AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The Office of Integrity and Compliance (OIC) is implementing this campaign across every level of staff at VHA. OIC leaders are presenting on virtual meetings with administrators, clinical leaders, program managers and volunteers in order to improve awareness of what constitutes FWA and improve understanding about where to report it. OIC has provided a [toolkit](#) with templates for staff to use including presentation slides, newsletters, emails, talking points, email signatures, videos and graphic design visual alerts.

To date, OIC has reached more than 450,000 VA employees and Veterans.

They’ve also built new partnerships with the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), public affairs officers (PAOs) throughout the VHA system, the VBA risk and ethics team and other organizations to increase effectiveness in communicating about FWA.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

All ORE employees are encouraged to champion FWA awareness and prevention, especially during this dedicated campaign. OIC asks that you:

- Understand what FWA is and how to report it;
- Champion the campaign by educating others, such as making a short FWA presentation at key meetings;
- Emphasize that reporting FWA is everyone’s responsibility;
- Review the [toolkit](#) to see what materials you can use.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

ORE TOWN HALL

We loved seeing and hearing from you all at our May Town Hall. If you were unable to attend, the May Town Hall can be viewed on [ORE SharePoint](#).

Also, if you haven’t already, please complete the [town hall follow up survey!](#)

REPORTING FWA

All suspected criminal activity should be reported to the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Contact the VA OIG Hotline at (800) 488-8244 or vaoighotline@va.gov.

VA employees can reach out to their facility Compliance Officer or call the OIC Help Line 24/7 at (866) 842-4357 (VHA-HELP) for assistance and guidance. Employees can refer to the [VHA Code of Integrity](#) to find the appropriate point of contact for reporting suspected FWA. All employees are encouraged to use whichever of these options they feel are most appropriate and that they are most comfortable with.

Employees within ORE can report FWA concerns directly to Tracy Davis Bradley, Acting Chief Integrity and Compliance Officer for VHA, at tracy.bradley@va.gov or (202)-461-7468.

More information about FWA is available by watching the [Fraud, Waste and Abuse Overview video](#).



BETTER TOGETHER CONVERSATIONS

On June 9, ORE launched the Better Together Conversations, a new informal discussion series to facilitate opportunities for personal connections, increased transparency and collaboration among program offices in a casual and friendly environment. Join us for discussions on how we can support each other to do our best to serve Veterans—and each other.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

continued from page 4

The next [Better Together Conversation](#) will be held on July 14 at 12pm EST. We look forward to connecting with you there!

PROGRAM OFFICE UPDATES

Office of Integrity and Compliance (OIC)

FWA Campaign Video

- The [Fraud, Waste and Abuse Overview video](#) is part of the 2021 OIC FWA campaign, which was launched on April 27. This new campaign is a revamp of the successful 'Integrity During a Pandemic' campaign, focusing on the following three objectives:
 - To partner with key stakeholders such as the Office of Inspector General and Office of Community Care to identify and combat FWA across the enterprise by educating VA employees, Veterans and their families on how to recognize and report acts of wrongdoing across the enterprise.
 - To mobilize VHA Compliance Officers as the "boots on the ground" to communicate and educate staff and Veterans on how to identify and report FWA.
 - To empower VHA leadership and staff to recognize and report FWA, and understand that the Code of Integrity is a resource to identify and report not just fraud, waste and abuse, but other issues that may crop up during crisis.

National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC) animated video series supports healthcare planning for Veterans

- As part of the effort to ensure that all Veterans will have their healthcare wishes honored, NCEHC has released a new, animated series of videos that highlight different communication approaches and tools to support patients at any age or stage of health.
 - [Ronin's story](#) about reflecting on the importance of understanding his dad's healthcare preferences.
 - [Adelita's story](#) about considering her future medical and mental health preferences with her doctor and family.
 - [Terrell's story](#) about identifying the person he wants to be responsible for communicating his healthcare wishes in case he is ever unable to speak for himself.

- [Suzanne's story](#) about planning for life-sustaining treatment.

- Additionally, feel free to share NCEHC's document that describes [practical tips for distributing and using the videos](#) to spark conversations with Veterans. A [QR-code poster](#)



**Healthcare Planning for All Veterans:
A Series of Animated Stories**

Use your phone to take a picture of the QR Code below to view the videos.



You can also visit www.ethics.va.gov/veterans.asp to access these stories and learn more about planning for your healthcare

The poster features four stylized avatars: a woman with short blonde hair, a woman with dark hair, a man with a beard and a brown hat, and a man with grey hair.

and [business card-sized handouts](#) are also available to help facilities share and distribute the videos to patients.

Internal Audit

- Internal Audit (IA) is currently developing materials for a communications plan to capture momentum and build awareness of IA's value across VHA.
- Communications materials will focus on the nature and benefit of IA's work.
- IA is targeting June 2021 to send their Directive 1370 updates to ORE for review.
- IA has also experienced team member growth this year, increasing from 9 to 18 team members. They are on a quest to reach 53 over the next three years.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

continued from page 5

Office of the Medical Inspector

- The Honorable Henry Kerner, Special Counsel, notified the President that the Office of Special Counsel favorably closed five (5) OMI investigations which have resulted in the implementation of sustainable processes for the improvement of Veteran care.
- For the first time, OMI is trending for fiscal year 2021 to have more non-Office of Special Counsel referrals than OSC referrals.
- OMI was tasked by Sec VA to respond to 3 LEAN Letters / 1 of the 3 (the Levin Letter) was a joint OMI / ORO investigation.

Office of Research Oversight

- In 2016, ORO changed the format of its periodic proactive reviews. VA facility's research oversight programs are (typically) reviewed in a *single* site visit by a multidisciplinary team involving members from ORO's various compliance-focused workgroups ("Combined Program Reviews").
- With the Combined Program Review format, ORO has achieved a 35% reduction in total on-site compliance site visits with only a 5% reduction in the number of internal VA facility research oversight programs (e.g., Human Research Protections Programs, Animal Care and Use Programs, etc.) reviewed.

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

VISIT US @ WWW.VA.GOV

CONTACT US



Thank you for reading *CONNECTION*. Have any ideas about how we can make the newsletter even better? Are there topics or individuals you want to hear more about? Send us an email: oreteamdis@disconsulting.com.