



LETTER FROM THE CHIEF

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

Dear Colleagues,

Serving alongside you in ORE this year has provided me with invaluable experience and great perspective I'll bring with me as I transition to a new chapter in my own VHA career. Together, we've turned five program offices into a highly effective oversight team that truly supports Veteran care. Working alongside a diverse group of people—who are united by our common commitment to serve Veterans and family members—has helped me recommit to my own passion for this important work.

You may remember our Better Together Conversation last July, when we spent some time discussing what we all have in common. I recall that many of us expressed a love of beautiful sunsets and a dislike of legendary Washington, D.C., traffic jams. But our conversation quickly turned to what really connects us: our common passion for serving America's Veterans. After all, that is what brought us here to VHA.

Each of us has a different reason for working to advance VHA's mission to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. As November is National Veterans and Military Families Month—it's a great time to discuss "What's Your Why?"

To start, let me tell you about the journey that brought me to VHA—and my own "Why."

Since I was a teenager, I knew I wanted to be a physician. I would often accompany family members to their doctor appointments, hoping to learn what I could at every opportunity. One summer when I was in college, I visited my great uncle in New York City and went with him to his medical appointments at the VA Medical Center.

By then, I knew enough to understand the difference between good and great medical care. And I could see that my great uncle was receiving excellent care at VA. In fact, he chose VA over private health care providers because he knew he got the

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

best care at VA. For the first time, I could picture myself as a VA physician, treating people like my great uncle and my two grandfathers—all Veterans.

As a medical resident in Baltimore, Maryland, I requested to work at VA. Even then, VA's medical records system was far more advanced than in other hospitals. When treating a patient, I had that patient's full medical history at my fingertips, and that allowed me to treat the whole person. I felt that VA's technology enabled physicians to provide the most informed, best quality care.

When I talk about my "Why," it's really about those basic few things. I came to VA because I wanted to be the doctor treating the individuals who served our country. I wanted to provide excellent care to someone's great uncle, someone's grandfather, someone's mother or someone's child. I knew that VA's resources would allow me to provide that excellent care.

Thank you for the work you do to support Veterans and meet VA's mission. I can't wait to hear about your "Why." I encourage

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you to [watch the video of our November Better Together Conversation](#). I enjoyed watching so many of our ORE team members share their stories—of their own military service and the family members who inspire them.

In my new role as the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for

Clinical Services, I will carry your perspective and commitment with me. I encourage you to continue collaborating across ORE.

Want to share your story?

Email bernadette.murphy@disconsulting.com.

ORE VETERAN SPOTLIGHT

Earlier this year, we began to highlight the Veterans amongst our ranks in ORE. We're honored to revisit some of those stories today and urge you to [read Dr. Scavella's Weekly Updates](#) to learn more about the Veterans on our team:

ELMER CLARK, USAF VETERAN

Office of the Medical Inspector, Executive Assistant

Elmer spent 25 years in the Air Force, during which he logged more than 2,500 flying hours as a medical Air Evacuation Technician. He flew seven different types of aircraft during his career. After retiring from the military, Elmer views his work at the VA as his way of staying connected to the military and his fellow servicemembers. Elmer's chief advice to new VA employees is to have situational awareness. "Sometimes, there's a disconnect between people who have served in uniform and people who come from other backgrounds," he explained. "I've learned to keep an open mind and remember that people are here because they want to do good. We may be used to different cultures, but we're all here for the same mission."



VANESSA ELLINGTON, USAFR VETERAN

Staff Assistance, Oversight, Risk and Ethics (10ORE); Management Analyst with GAO OIG Accountability Liaison (GOAL)

After working in private health care for several years, Vanessa felt called to service and joined the Air Force Reserve. During her 21-year-career in the Air Force Reserve, she received indefinite term appointment as a First Lieutenant in the Medical Services Corps. Ellington was also selected as the first United States Air Force Reserve (USAFR) Officer to augment the new NATO HQ ACT and served as



a NATO Staff Officer to support the final development and resolution of the new NATO Transformation Command, which became operational in 2003.

Of her civilian career, she says, "As a Veteran myself, I always keep VA's mission at the center of my focus. By working to support VA's mission to serve Veterans and families, I continue to give back and serve my country in my civilian career. Every single Veteran has decided to do their part to serve and sacrifice for the common good—and to fight to ensure democracy and freedom. By serving Veterans and families at VA, I honor all the men and women who served—past, present and future—with all the respect they deserve."

CHRISTOPHER PATE, USA VETERAN

VHA Internal Audit, Director, Risk Assessment, Quality and Analytics (RAQA)

Christopher Pate, who now has a series of advanced degrees to his name (including Ph. D, MPA, CQIA, EDMA) served nearly 25 years in the United States Army. Throughout his career he served a range of leadership and operational assignments in Army healthcare. He retired from the Army Medical Command in 2008. Fun fact: both his oldest and youngest children were born in overseas—one in Germany and one in Japan. This picture of then-Lieutenant Pate was taken in Friedberg Mountain, Germany.



JAMES REYNOLDS, USA VETERAN

Office of Research Oversight, Management Analyst, Research Information Security Workgroup

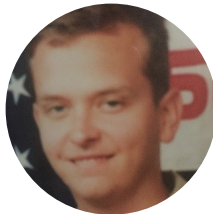
After growing up in Houston, TX, and Miami, FL, James joined the Army in August 1989 to feed his desire to help people, to serve and to defend his ideals. James served as a Signal Intelligence Analyst and is a combat Veteran of Operation

ORE VETERAN SPOTLIGHT

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Desert Shield and Desert Storm. After surgery to repair injuries sustained during his service, he joined the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program, using his Midrange Programming degree to serve the VA's Information Technology team. It's here that James "rediscovered what service was all about and fell in love with the VA mission." Outside of work, he spends time with his family—including 4 children and a dog.

James' advice about serving Veterans is that "EVERY Veteran, no matter the branch, no matter the era, and no matter the nature of their service (combat or peacetime) deserve to be treated as heroes. They all have a story to tell and deserve to have the opportunity to tell their story. Always listen, you might learn something interesting, and in the process you might in some way help that Veteran find peace with the hidden struggles that so many bear."



JACQUELYN STURDIVANT, USA VETERAN

Office of Integrity and Compliance Program Specialist, Education and Workforce Development

Jacquelyn is an Army Veteran from Hawaii living in Peoria,

Arizona, with her three children and husband of twenty years. Before joining OIC, Jacquelyn worked as a Lead Training Specialist with Education Service at the Phoenix VA. She began her career at VA almost 25 years ago, as a GS-4 Office Automation Clerk in Human Resources Service in Honolulu, HI. She says, "When I began my career at VA, I was a single parent of a two-year-old. Gaining experience from the ground up, taking chances and calculated risks, volunteering for various roles and opportunities all while obtaining a college education definitely gave me the perspective and knowledge necessary to continue to grow personally and professionally and the resilience needed to keep my head up, not be discouraged by setbacks and thrive and maintain the desire to move forward."



Thank you to all Veterans on our team here at ORE for your continued service to our country.

We are grateful this and every month to work for and among Veterans and Servicemembers. If you're a Veteran who would like to share your story and tell the ORE team Why You Serve, email your story and a photo to Bernadette Murphy. Thank you for your service!

PEACE OF MIND CAN BE THE BEST GIFT: HELPING VETERANS MAKE LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT DECISIONS

At a time when Veterans who have a serious illness should be focusing on what matters most to them, like spending time with loved ones or enjoying a favorite pastime, they may find themselves instead scrambling to get information as they try to make seemingly impossible decisions like which life-sustaining treatment to choose—or whether to choose any at all.

When the end of life is near, many people tend to do everything but face it. Whether it's a parent, a friend or our own self facing end-of-life decisions, it's easy to pretend that things will simply sort themselves out. We may focus on the "now" instead of having the tough conversations around topics that feel taboo and uncomfortable—like death and dying and the decisions that come with it.

VHA's National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCEHC), within the Office of Oversight, Risk and Ethics (ORE), understands that making critical decisions about health care and end of life



are even more difficult when we are stressed, overwhelmed and grieving. When Veterans with a serious illness should be focusing on what matters most to them, like spending time with loved ones or enjoying a favorite pastime, they may find themselves instead scrambling to get information as

PEACE OF MIND CAN BE THE BEST GIFT: HELPING VETERANS MAKE LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT DECISIONS

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they try to make seemingly impossible decisions like which life-sustaining treatment to choose—or whether to choose any at all.

HELPING VETERANS MAKE IMPORTANT HEALTH CARE DECISIONS—BEFORE THE CRISIS

The VA Life-Sustaining Treatment Decisions Initiative (LSTDI) is an NCEHC project designed to help Veterans with serious illness, their families and healthcare surrogates, make decisions about life-sustaining treatments ahead of time. That way when the time comes, the Veteran and family can rest assured knowing the Veteran's wishes will be respected and followed.

Life-sustaining treatments, including feeding tubes, mechanical ventilation and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), offer risks and benefits. With advance planning, patients have an opportunity to make choices that can help them reach their healthcare goals at a time when they may not feel like they have much control.

WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, THE VA HEALTHCARE TEAM STEPS IN FOR A “GOALS OF CARE” CONVERSATION

The time may never feel “right” to talk about life-sustaining treatments. Patients may be worried about upsetting their loved ones or vice-versa. Perhaps the Veteran's family or surrogate may disagree with some of the Veteran's decisions. Whatever the case, VA is there to help facilitate. The role of the VA healthcare team is to understand what is important to the Veteran and to enable the patient to decide and communicate

what they would like to achieve through health care.

VA healthcare providers and staff, including doctors, physician assistants, nurses, social workers, psychologists and chaplains, are trained to conduct “goals of care” discussions before the time of crisis. These conversations should come up when it's clear the Veteran may be a high-risk patient, or when they realize they will most likely need some more intensive care in the near-term.

“WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU?”

This is the core question that the VA healthcare team asks high-risk patients.

Each patient's goals will be different, but they may include easing symptoms to feel more comfortable, staying or becoming independent, curing an illness or improving quality of life when a cure is not possible. The patient's goal could be to support loved ones and caregivers, or to meet a specific personal goal like attending a wedding.

The best care VA can give is peace of mind to Veterans and their loved ones. The conversations may be emotional or upsetting, but by asking questions and making decisions ahead of time, families and surrogates can be spared doubts, worry and guilt when their loved one's death is near. Most of all, the Veteran will know that their voice was heard, and they had control when it mattered the most.

For more information and resources, visit <https://www.ethics.va.gov/LSTDI.asp>.

ORE STAFF ANSWER “WHAT'S YOUR WHY”

As we spend November celebrating Veterans and Military Families Month, it's a great time for each of us to step back and think about why we have chosen to work at VHA.

As a team, ORE is a diverse group. Some of us are Veterans, some of us are moms or dads of servicemembers. Some of us have never served in the Armed Forces. Yet we are here, working on behalf of the men and women who have served our nation.

Our shared commitment to serve Veterans is what unites us.

What is it about VHA's mission—to “honor America's Veterans

by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and well-being”—that resonates with each one of us?

In her introductory letter to this newsletter, Dr. Scavella talked about why she has chosen to spend her career at VHA. Over the past several months, many of you have also answered the question, “What's Your Why?”

Below is a collection of your responses to “What's Your Why”—some with attribution, and some anonymous. Some are as short as a few words, and some are much longer. They all speak to our reason for being a part of this team and shine a light on our shared sense of purpose.

ORE STAFF ANSWER “WHAT’S YOUR WHY”

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“A mission-driven organization helps you get up every morning, knowing that what you are doing is so much bigger than just a job, it’s caring for those that cared for us.” Anonymous

“My husband retired from the U.S. Army on September 1. He is my why. I choose to work at VA serving Veterans because of him and the brave men and women who have served their country and sacrificed for our freedom. I want to make sure they receive the quality health care and benefits they earned.” Christie Rogers, IA

“My father and 2 grandfathers were Army Veterans, one who received his end-of-life care at the local VAMC. I keep the letter from the Director sent to my mother about his care at my desk.” Anonymous

“I work at VA because I want to serve my brothers and sisters in arms. Especially women Veterans, because I am a Veteran, and I know how tough it has been for us. I try to give VA the best that I am able to. And even when I leave VA, that’s what I am going to continue to do. I’m going to continue my fight to ensure that our Veterans are served.”
Leeann (Kehau) Canne, OIC

“Because they protected our country in times of need. I want to assist with honoring Veterans for their service to our country.” Anonymous

“To serve those that protect our lives and secure our freedom.” Gladys Felan, IA

“As the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran who was a Green Beret, an Army Veteran myself and the spouse of a retired Army Veteran, the VA mission is near and dear to my heart.” Anonymous

“I am a military spouse, with two children, both in the Army. My son is active and my daughter is in the

National Guard. Working at VA is a very honorable job and gives me the ability to positively impact our Veterans.” Andria Nichols, OIC

“I did not serve, but so many family members did. I love VA’s mission.” Anonymous

“To ensure Veterans are treated respectfully and receive excellent customer service, and to assist those that have difficulties navigating our complicated system.” Deborah Payne, OIC

“It’s an honor to serve my fellow comrades. I can make a difference in the care they receive. I’m here to push myself and others to ensure we honor and serve our Veterans with love, compassion, and excellence.” Anonymous

“Since I am a Veteran, when I do my job well, I am helping myself as a VA patient. Plus, I understand what our Veterans have given and do really enjoy being able to give back to them.”
Paul Tompkins, NCEHC

“To impact Veteran’s lives in positive way by supporting systems, processes, and oversight that directly attribute to patient care and research. Is helpful to be a Veteran and connected to these missions as well since that adds value and insight.”
Greg Gilbo, ORO

“To help my brothers and sisters who also served.”
William Bowman, ERM

“It is an honor to serve Veterans who have given so much to our country.” Anonymous

No matter your “why,” each of us does work that has meaning and value—and that makes a positive difference in the lives of men and women who have served our country.

VHA OBSERVED FEDERAL RISK AWARENESS WEEK: OCTOBER 25–29, 2021

This year was the first observance of Federal Risk Awareness Week at VHA, alongside agencies across the federal government. During Federal Risk Awareness Week (October 25–29), all VHA employees were encouraged to continue their focus on patient safety and also look for opportunities to improve care for Veterans in their areas of responsibility.

“Sometimes in our business operations, carefully managed risks can lead to opportunities to improve Veterans’ experiences,” said Dr. Steven L. Lieberman, Acting Steven L. Lieberman, VHA Acting Under Secretary for Health, in an email message to staff. “We can identify opportunities and threats and put steps in place to address them.”

ORE launched two new digital tools for Federal Risk Awareness Week:

- [Video](#): ORE created a new animated white-board video with two examples of how VHA captured opportunities to improve patient care.
- [Quiz](#): ORE’s new Online Risk Appetite Quiz allows employees to follow the “Anxious Adam” character through a day at the beach to evaluate their personal appetite for risk.



LEARN MORE

Risk Awareness Week also provided an opportunity to share ERM resources and support with program managers and VISN/facility leaders at multiple levels.

- [ERM Community of Practice](#): Leaders and program managers are invited to participate in the ERM Community of Practice to better understand the ERM framework, receive support in building and expanding a local ERM program and discuss risk challenges and solutions.
- Questions? Email VHAERM@va.gov

VHA OBSERVED NATIONAL COMPLIANCE AND ETHICS WEEK: NOVEMBER 8–12, 2021

ORE led the observance of [National Compliance and Ethics Week](#) again this year. This year’s theme of Awareness, Recognition and Reinforcement emphasized the importance of acting with integrity. Employees were reminded of the importance of following the [VHA Code of Integrity](#) in all activities and understanding fraud, waste and abuse and how to report it properly.

To support clinical and support staff in the field dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s observance was conducted on a smaller scale than years past. Integrity and Compliance Officers (ICOs) at local VA Medical Centers used tools from the Office of Integrity and Compliance (OIC) to raise awareness.



LEARN MORE

- [VHA Code of Integrity](#)
- [Choose Your Own Compliance Adventure Challenge](#)
- [Townhall Video](#): VA Leaders discuss whistleblowers and compliance officers
- [Fraud, Waste and Abuse Video](#)

VA DATA ANALYTICS SERVICE HOSTS HACKATHON

What happens when you bring together passionate public servants, brilliant data scientists and experienced analysts to collaborate on a problem using the latest cloud-based technology? A hackathon!

On August 17th and 18th, the VA hosted a data science hackathon focused on a common issue in VA and throughout the healthcare industry: inaccurate medical coding. For those not familiar with the term, medical coding is assigning industry standard alphanumeric codes to medical diagnoses, procedures, and services. Unfortunately, inaccurate assignments can negatively impact patient care, pollute research and misrepresent accounting (often with improper payments).

VA's Office of Integrity and Compliance (OIC) regularly audits medical coding to manually identify errors. OIC sought ways to automate and improve error detection, so they partnered with the VA's Financial Services Center (FSC) Data Analytics Service (DAS) to "hack" on this challenge.

WHO IS DAS?

The VA hosts an array of financial management, professional, and administrative services at FSC, located in Austin, Texas. The FSC is divided into various service groups organized around revenue centers and product lines, including the Data Analytics Service (DAS). VA FSC DAS leverages advanced analytics to combine large volumes of data into clear, meaningful, and transformational insights. To enhance capabilities across the VA enterprise, DAS delivers the following data services:

- Business Intelligence, Modeling, and Data Science/Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning
- Visualization, Reporting, Ad Hoc Consulting
- Architecture and Governance
- Integration, Management, and Lifecycle
- Product Training and Tier 3 Support

HOW WAS THE HACKATHON PLANNED?

A lot happens behind the scenes to pull off an event like this. With the uncertainties of COVID, a planning committee held a daily scrum call and had to be agile including pivoting to a virtual event shortly before game time.

While the hackathon event itself was an achievement, so too was the collaboration between many VA organizations (e.g., DAS, Financial Technology Services (FTS), National Artificial Intelligence Institute (NAII), OIC, and integrity Compliance Audit Readiness Division (iCARD)) and external planning

partners (Microsoft, Databricks, and Booz Allen Hamilton) to organize the event.

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

The hack teams were made up of a mixed group from VA business owners, Microsoft, Databricks, and DAS (supported by Booz Allen Hamilton). Each team had a team captain, an audit subject matter expert (SME), two data scientists, and two to three data engineers. The teams had access to the OIC business and data owners for questions regarding the use case and the data.

They also had access to FTS support services for technical questions, needs, or issues. Additionally, there were three judges (supported by NAII, OIC, and FTS) who developed the criteria and shared it with the teams prior to the event. The audience of over 50 interested parties were engaged with the final team presentations, judging and award.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE HACK?

After a brief kickoff call on the first day of the hackathon, the teams jumped into their respective virtual meeting rooms and began digging into the data. The teams did not have much time to review the data before the event, so initial efforts were to understand the details of the data with assistance from OIC. As the data scientists contemplated what inputs would be best for a predictive machine learning model, one of the first significant tasks was weeding out many irrelevant columns of data that could not be used for features in a model.

The teams also took advantage of the new AutoML feature in Databricks that allows you to quickly generate baseline models to help fast-forward through the usual trial-and-error of selecting the best model, all with a low code approach. This quick model recommendation and development was a game changer for the hack teams to get early momentum.

One of the significant challenges of any data science project is incomplete and messy data. This hackathon was no exception as the hack teams found the inaccurately coded encounters were a relatively small percentage of the model training dataset which makes prediction more difficult.

Each team took different approaches to tackle this issue along with their varying techniques for model tuning. The elasticity of the cloud showed its value when the FTS support team was able to easily double the Azure Databricks cluster sizes at the end of the first day to enable the hack teams to run their models faster against the validation dataset.

VA DATA ANALYTICS SERVICE HOSTS HACKATHON

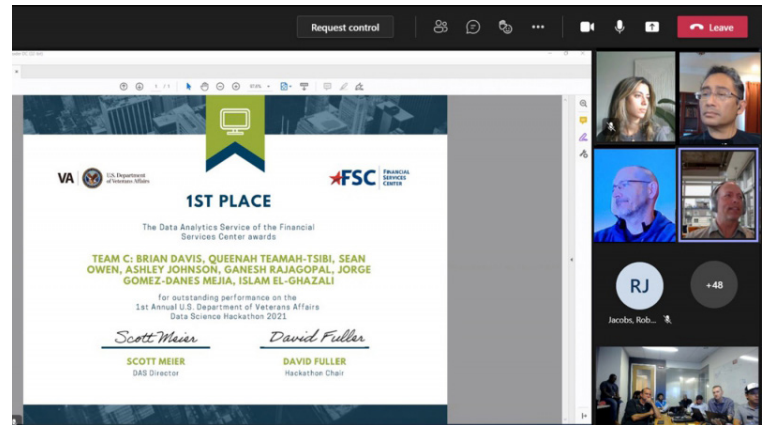
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The second day had the teams focused on validating their models and preparing for the final tasks which included running their model against a final test dataset and producing a ten-minute presentation to show their findings and results. The judges scored each team on weighted factors for accuracy, significance, innovation, interpretability, and professionalism. This brings us to our final results and winner...

WHO WON?

Team 3 takes the prize! We congratulate our winners who include Brian Davis, QueenahTeamah-Tsibi, Sean Owen, Ashley Johnson, Ganesh Rajagopal, Jorge Mejia, and Islam El-Ghazali. While model accuracy wasn't the only factor considered, Team 3 evaluated 39 features and generated a random forest classifier model with 87% accuracy rate and a AUC (Area Under The Curve) ROC (Receiver Operating Characteristics) score of 62%—not bad for a two day hackathon.

Though we only crowned one winner, all the teams felt like winners because they worked together to hack on a lingering problem that plagues veterans' health and benefits. Many participants walked away remarking on the fun learning experience and thinking of how to incorporate the hackathon process into their daily activities and product design process.



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

DAS hopes to leverage the lessons learned from this hackathon to accelerate data science at VA including potentially conducting mini-hacks with business owners to see what the data can show. OIC hopes to use the lessons learned to enhance their audit and monitoring process.

With the energy and momentum generated by this event, DAS is also pitching an expanded hackathon to include broader participation, additional use-cases, informational breakout sessions, and an on-site social event. With the recent drastic changes in working conditions, hackathons can provide a healthy way to promote partnerships and drive engagement.

Submitted By: David P. Fuller, Chief, Data Analytics Division, Financial Services Center

VETERAN OF THE DAY SPOTLIGHT

Did you know that [VAntage point](#) highlights a unique Veteran of the Day daily on social media? In celebration of Veteran's Day 2021, we're sharing some of those stories here.



DEBORAH TROUBA, USAF

Air Force Veteran [Deborah Trouba](#) joined the service in November of 1972, spending more than half of her 20-year career at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. Deborah served in many postings, including: Korea with the 8th Security Police Squadron, Grand Forks with the 319th Bombardment Wing and at The Pentagon with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Continuing her legacy of service, she learned to sew in 2019 and provided more than 300 masks to friends, family, doctors and nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

JAMES HARVEY III, USAF

Air Force Veteran [James Harvey III](#) was a class president and valedictorian before being drafted by the Army in 1943. He graduated from flight school at Tuskegee Army Air Field as a second lieutenant. After his squadron disbanded when the U.S.

VETERAN OF THE DAY SPOTLIGHT

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military officially ended segregation, Harvey joined the 332nd Fighter Group, going on to serve at Misawa Air Base in Japan flying F-80 Shooting Stars. He was the first black jet fighter pilot to fly in Korean airspace, and he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, along with 11 different Air Medals during his time in the military. He retired a lieutenant colonel after 22 years of service.

TONY GARCIA, USMC

Marine Corps Veteran [Tony Garcia](#) enlisted at the age of 19 in April 2002. He served two combat tours to Iraq, acting as squad and team leader during his second tour. He left active duty in 2006 to begin his education, eventually attaining a Master's of Social Work specializing in mental health and the military. He brought that motivation to the VHA. Garcia helps Veterans who have experienced homelessness by assisting them with obtaining and maintaining housing and providing resources to connect Veterans.

EDWARD BRYANT BATES, USN

Navy Veteran [Edward Bryant Bates](#) tried to join the Marine Corps in San Francisco after Pearl Harbor, but the recruiting officer knew he was lying about his age. He became a merchant marine at age 17 and joined the Navy a year later in 1943. He spent 18 months in combat, deployed to the Pacific Theater. He served as a cryptologic technician, intercepting Japanese naval messages and monitoring enemy ship movements. He left the service after World War II, but reenlisted to serve as a cryptologic technician against the Soviets in the Cold War. After leaving the Navy, he was a three-time sheriff, then attended college through the GI Bill and completed two trainings at the FBI Academy. He would go on to receive both a bachelor's and a master's degree in criminology, retire from law enforcement, and teach criminology at Fresno State until his full retirement in 1990.

PANYA LAONA, USA

Army Veteran [Panya Laona](#) grew up in Phetchabun, Thailand, where he lived until being granted a US. visa in 1998. He enlisted in the Army in February 2001 and deployed to Iraq in 2006, serving 15 months in Balad, before transferring to Germany to serve as a platoon sergeant in the Field Artillery Squadron, 2nd Stryker Brigade. In April 2010, Laona deployed

to Afghanistan, where he helped capture six improvised explosive device (IED) makers and conducted 162 combat patrol operations. After being directly hit by two IED explosions, his battalion commander suggested he return home. Laona, however, requested to stay in Afghanistan and served the remainder of his deployment on base. He deployed to Afghanistan a final time in 2013 where he served as forward operating base mayor. He retired from the military as a sergeant first class in February 2021. He is now a part of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association.



SHAROLYN WALCUTT, USN

Navy Veteran [Sharolyn Walcutt](#) served as a nurse in the Vietnam War, beginning her Naval career with a three-month program in Rhode Island, where she watched videos about ships and the military and swam the cold waters of the northern Atlantic. She began her service as a nurse with two years at New York's St. Alban's Naval Hospital. Walcutt was one of 29 nurses selected to join the USS Repose floating hospital, as part of the first group of nurses to serve in Vietnam. Onboard USS Repose, Walcutt triaged casualties, treated patients infected with malaria, and worked with the orthopedic unit to help amputees. She also helped the injured as part of the Vietnamese women and children's unit. She continued her service at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California, before moving to Guam to work at a Naval Hospital as a civilian. After her years of service, Walcutt joined the Navy Nurse Corps Association, participating in biannual trips, seminars and conventions.

NEW ORE RESOURCES

Check out the variety of tools and resources below, which are designed to streamline information sharing and improve ORE processes. If you have a project or tool you'd like to share, please email [Kelly O'Donnell](mailto:kelly.o'donnell@vha.gov).

- IA Resources
 - [Pain Management Case Study](#)
 - [IA FAQs](#)
 - White board video #1 - [VHA's Office of Internal Audit Helps Employees Address Those Monstrous Issues That Keep Them Up](#)
 - White board video #2 - [VHA's Office of Internal Audit Case Study of the Pain Management Team Audit](#)
- ORE leadership videos
 - [Office of Internal Audit](#)
 - [Office of Integrity and Compliance](#)
 - [National Center for Ethics in Health Care](#)
 - [Office of the Medical Inspector](#)
 - [Office of Research Oversight](#)



- [Enterprise Risk Management video](#)
- [Online Risk Appetite Quiz](#)
- [Choose Your Own Compliance Adventure tool](#)
- [Weekly Emails](#)

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Federal Risk Awareness Week (October 25–29) included the successful launch of ORE's [new Online Risk Appetite Quiz and new video](#) with examples of how VHA captured opportunities to improve patient care.
- ORE's William Bowman also spoke at the Institute for Defense and Government Advancement
- Compliance and Ethics Week (November 8–12) focused on the theme of Awareness, Recognition and Reinforcement. OIC provided [several digital tools, including a Choose Your Own Compliance Adventure module](#).

ORE TOWN HALLS

Thank you to all who joined our September 2021 ORE Town Hall. We appreciate your attendance and participation! The ORE Town Hall was filled with tons of valuable information, celebrations for service recognitions and more! If you'd like to access the presentation, please visit the [ORE SharePoint Site, Town Hall Folder](#).

Our next ORE Town Hall is scheduled for Thursday, January 13, 2022, from 11am–12:30pm ET. You should have received the

calendar invitation for the event, if you have not, please reach out to [Alfreda Holmes](mailto:alfreda.holmes@vha.gov).

We hope to see you there!

BETTER TOGETHER CONVERSATIONS

It's been great seeing and chatting with everyone each month during our Better Together Conversations. The last session was held on November 10, following the theme of The Veterans We Serve, and the Veterans Among Us. In case you missed it, you can watch a recording of the November Better Together Conversation on Teams.

We have one session left this year—we hope you are excited to wrap up our 2021 Better Together Conversations series on Wednesday, December 8 at 12pm ET. More details to be shared in the coming weeks!

With great participation and feedback over the last six months, we will continue to offer these conversations in 2022 as well! Please be on the lookout for the new calendar invitation series from [Alfreda Holmes](mailto:alfreda.holmes@vha.gov).

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you again for your participation in this engaging series. We look forward to seeing you at the next session.

ORE PROGRAM OFFICE VIDEOS

[Office of the Medical Inspector: Focusing on the Veterans Health Administration Clinical Quality](#)

Dr. Erica Scavella and Dr. Alan Hirshberg discuss how VHA's Office of the Medical Inspector investigates quality concerns and helps the VA system improve care.

[Office of Research Oversight: Facilitating the Responsible Conduct of VA research](#)

Dr. Erica Scavella and Dr. Doug Bannerman discuss the role of the VHA Office of Research Oversight ("ORO") in facilitating the responsible conduct of VA research.

AWARDS

Office of Integrity and Compliance received two awards for the Fraud, Waste and Abuse Awareness Campaign:

- Health Ethics Trust Health Care Best Practices Award
- National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association 2021 Excellence in Public Awareness Award (Honorable Mention).

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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.