

Embedding “Ethics” Throughout the Fabric of BIDMC

The Problem

BIDMC “ethics programs” are exactly the sum of the actions, virtues, compassion, and other moral qualities of every doctor, nurse, administrator, and other staff member. But few staff have had active roles in promoting the mission of BIDMC Ethics Programs: “To ensure that all BIDMC staff are supported in doing their work in accordance with BIDMC’s and their own highest moral standards.” Engaging more staff in “ethics” roles could help ensure BIDMC’s excellence in equitability, safety, and patient-centeredness, and enhance staff pride/morale in ways that help recruitment and retention.

Aim/Goal

To identify and support “Ethics Liaisons” in every operational area of the medical center, who promote BIDMC’s core moral values among their colleagues and ensure they have any ethics-related support that they need.

The Team

Members/staff of the BIDMC Ethics Support Service:

Lachlan Forrow, MD, Director, BIDMC Ethics Programs

Stephen O’Neill, LICSW, JD, Assoc. Director, BIDMC Ethics Programs

Wendy McHugh, RN, BIDMC Nurse Ethicist

Chanel Bryant-Alexander, Program Coordinator

The Interventions

- All Department/Division leaders, and relevant senior managers, asked to designate an Ethics Liaison for their area (annually);
- Orientation for Liaisons, w/ binder of materials related to BIDMC clinical and organizational ethics and policies (annually);
- Creation of program of annual “Ethics Projects” by each Liaison
- Monthly lunch meetings of Liaisons

Primary Hurdles/Challenges

- Liaison role is entirely “volunteer work” for busy staff
- Limited time of Ethics Support Service members for outreach to and support of Liaisons

The Results/Progress to Date



Lessons Learned

- Participating BIDMC Staff are enthusiastic about and proud of their identity as “Ethics Liaisons”
- Liaisons identify ethics-related opportunities for improvements in their areas, and have practical wisdom about how to achieve them, that someone outside their area likely never would
- Active, individualized outreach to Liaisons by Ethics Support Service staff is often crucial in catalyzing their contributions

Next Steps/What Should Happen Next

- Increase support to Liaisons for their annual Ethics Projects
- Obtain increased operating or philanthropic support for the program



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For More Information Contact
Chanel Bryant, Program Coordinator
Ichanelb@bidmc.harvard.edu