

DoD Medical Ethics Center (DMEC)
at
Uniformed Services University
(USU)

Defense Health Board (DHB) Brief
Monday, 23 April 2018

DMEC Documentation

- Defense Health Board's 2015 report "Ethical Guidelines and Practices for US Military Medical Professionals," and responsive ASD(HA) implementation memorandum
- DoDI 6025.27 (published 8 November 2017)
- DoD Medical Ethics Center (DMEC) Charter (presently under USU refinement with forthcoming review by Health Affairs for final execution)
- USU Presidential Policy Memorandum (PPM) relating to DMEC (subsequently created to provide more granularity for specific mission objectives and provide more local latitude in revision)

DMEC Vision

- Establish the DoD Medical Ethics Program Office at USU, known as the DoD Medical Ethics Center (DMEC), to facilitate a common cultural ethos throughout the MHS, and serve as a knowledge repository and consultancy resource for all military health professionals

DMEC Mission Objectives (DoDI 6025.27)

- Task 1 → Establishes, implements, and maintains the DoDMEP Office, which will serve as the national and international lead in military medical ethics (Section 2.3a)
- Task 2 → Participates in development of policy, guidance, and oversight for matters related to medical ethics within the MHS (Section 2.3b) (“A Code of Military Medical Ethics,” recently approved for publication)
- Task 3 → Develop a plan for MHS training (Section 5c)

DMEC Mission Objectives

(DoDI 6025.27)

- Task 4 → Develop and maintain a DoD Health Care Ethics Portal that will:
 - (1) Serve as a centralized resource for health care ethics information and capable of receiving inquiries and requests for consultation
 - (2) Contain links to relevant policies, guidance, and laws; information about sources of education and training; and pertinent professional codes of ethics (Section 5d)
- Task 5 → Maintain a contact list of the designated subject matter experts in health care ethics to provide consultative services and develop procedures to support an auxiliary consultation capacity for health care professionals (Section 5e)

DMEC Timeline

- Initial Operating Capacity (IOC) tentative timeline is Fall 2018
- Functional Operating Capacity (FOC) tentative timeline is 6-8 months after ICO (circa Spring 2019)

DMEC Positions/Personnel

- DMEC Director → (visionary leadership and mission focus)
- DMEC Deputy Director → (operational coordination, planning and implementation)
- DMEC Ethicist → (subject matter expertise, inquiry response and curriculum development)
- DMEC IT Specialist → (health care ethics portal and website construction, management and integration)
- DMEC Administrative Assistant → (general administrative support)
- DMEC Legal Advisor → (legal expertise)
- Additional personnel (staff and ethics consultants)

Current Medical Ethics Landscape

- Societal and media perceptions of military medical practice
- Varying influences on ethical thought/practices dependent on age, cultural & economic background, and religious beliefs of providers, both military and civilian
- Advances in medical technology
- Determining the roles of patient's providers in decision making
- Potential conflicts between autonomy and beneficence
- Ethical practices in deployed environment
- Appropriate parameters of patient and healthcare workers conduct
- Confidentiality and disclosure of PHI
- Military mission/chain of command influence and potential conflict of interest

Current Medical Ethics Resources

What medical ethics resources are currently in existence?

- Some MTFs and MEDCENs have standing Ethics Committees
- Recognized medical ethics experts within the services and DoD to include USU Ethics Program
- Ethics Centers at VA, NIH, Military Academies, NDU, NWC
- Access to wide range of civilian medical ethics programs and centers

Potential Medical Ethics Opportunities

What vectors are available to reinforce medical ethics within the MHS?

- Development of a cadre of medical ethics expertise that can be a source of ethics consult, education and outreach
- Establish a repository of medical ethics information and case studies that can be used by MTFs and providers to assist in decision making
- Coordinate with other government, academic, and specialty organizations to gather, share and disseminate medical ethics experiences and practices

Near-Term DMEC Taskers

- Access funding lines for DMEC implementation (seed money and follow on POM budget cycle)
- Hire DMEC personnel to initiate build out phase (both physical location and online medical ethics portal presence)
- Provide opportunities for DMEC team members to enhance their own currency and expertise by participation in conferences dealing with current medical ethics topics
- Identify and meet potential customers within the MHS and beyond to ensure tailored responsiveness and respect for multi-dimension chains of command (i.e. MTF/Clinic Commanders, MTF Ethicists, military health care personnel, line commanders, etc.)

Near-Term DMEC Taskers (cont.)

- Establish triage procedures for initial consultancy requests after IOC to ensure foundational capability
- Coordinate with both internal and external ethics centers for both professional expertise and research collaboration (i.e. VA, NIH, USNA, USMA, USAFA, NDU, NWC, Georgetown University, Harvard University, University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, etc.)
- Formalize the medical ethics curriculum and begin to develop deployment mediums (i.e. on-site training, distance resources, train-the-trainer initiatives, etc.) as a reinforcing closed-loop feedback cycle for continuous improvement