



June 2021



Dear Friends,  
It is with heartfelt thanks that we dedicate this newsletter to our volunteers – those who give so freely and generously of their time, wisdom and talent to bring the Center's work to life. This work simply could not be done without the contributions of our tireless volunteers, some of whom have been part of the Center's work for decades. Whether teaching, leading discussions, serving on committees, mentoring, sewing quilts, or giving voice to new ethical issues, volunteers are pivotal to our mission. We are deeply grateful for their passion and selfless service.



We, along with you, are celebrating the rising rate of vaccinations and the gradual return of pre-pandemic freedoms. It has been an unprecedented time for us all, one from which we have found new strengths and new insights. In health care we have been met with many, sometimes overwhelming, challenges. These challenges provide invaluable opportunities to make exciting changes, and there is much good news for us to report!

With deepest appreciation to you all,

*Susan*

Susan W. Tolle, MD  
Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair  
Director, Center for Ethics in Health Care  
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## Dr. Katie Stowers Launches Virtual VitalTalk Trainings

The **Ronald W. Naito Director in Serious Illness Education**, Dr. Katie Stowers, guided a team to complete the herculean task of, first, adapting the VitalTalk Faculty Development training course to a virtual format, and then training 22 new faculty members over the course of three days (with a second training to follow in October). This brings to 35 the number of Oregon clinicians who will be trained to teach the essential art of having skilled and compassionate conversations with seriously ill patients and their families.

Chosen for their leadership in communication skills, the VitalTalk faculty are physicians and advance care practice leaders from numerous specialties across OHSU and the region. Their VitalTalk training empowers each of them to create sustainable training programs within their specialty, creating a ripple effect of skilled mentorship across the health system and the State of Oregon.

"This group has a positive energy and ambition towards excellence in communications skills training like I've never seen before," Dr. Stowers observed after the course.

The Center takes enormous pride in Dr. Stowers' work, as does the national VitalTalk leadership, which honored her contributions in the attached letter.

## The Annual Kinsman Conference Attracts Record Attendance

In another pivot to the times, this year's **Statewide Kinsman Bioethics Conference** was delivered virtually April 15-16, with a record 384 people registering for the event. Co-sponsored by the Samaritan Health System, with the theme *Truth, Power, Justice: Bioethics as a Voice for Equity*, the conference was rich in a diversity of thought-provoking topics. Response from participants was very positive, including comments such as "profound, beautiful and inspiring," "excellent and relevant," "outstanding" and "the best Kinsman ever." We are very grateful to the 40 faculty who worked so hard to make the conference such a success.

## POLST Article Establishes Oregon as Standard Leader

In a recent editorial published by *The Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, Dr. Susan Tolle used data from 440,000 forms submitted to the Oregon POLST Registry to provide leadership in assuring the high quality use of POLST. **Aligning POLST orders with wishes: Time to put evidence into practice** outlines key findings from the data, which will serve as an invaluable guide for POLST programs in assuring patient wishes are carefully elicited, accurately recorded and ultimately honored.

For help in making a gift to the Center for Ethics, please contact Liz Arrington at [arringtl@ohsu.edu](mailto:arringtl@ohsu.edu) or 503-552-0716.



## 2020-2021 Center for Ethics Volunteer List

We gratefully acknowledge the numerous community and professional hours contributed to the  
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All City Palliative Care  
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Bioethics Study Group  
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Center for Ethics Special Events  
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Oregon and Beyond Lecture Series

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*Dr. Katie Stowers, the Ronald W. Naito Director in Serious Illness Education leading the virtual faculty three-day VitalTalk Conference.*



## Award Letter for Dr. Katie Stowers

May 18, 2021

VitalTalk would like to acknowledge valuable contributions of Dr. Katie Stowers for the work she has done above and beyond our expectations.

VitalTalk is the leading provider of evidence-based communication skills training to thousands of clinicians across the globe. Our influence can be felt in academic and tertiary medical centers, integrated health systems, hospitals and community clinics alike. Through our integrated network of 700+ Faculty Clinicians, we have collectively taught nearly 20,000 clinicians to have more competent, compassionate, and values-based conversations with seriously ill patients and their families.

The challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for VitalTalk to provide effective training on a virtual platform. Dr. Stowers used her leadership, innovation and project management skills to work harmoniously with several other clinician faculty, VitalTalk founders and staff, to build a wonderful educational experience for clinicians who want to teach communication skills. In addition, she worked with other leaders to coordinate this program with our other offerings. The impact of her work is tremendous – it will improve the ability of thousands of clinicians to have better conversations with seriously ill patients and their families.

Dr. Stowers has been a strategic champion in bringing VitalTalk to Oregon Health and Science University. She is working to make sure every seriously ill patient at OHSU is surrounded by clinicians who can speak about what matters most and match care to values.

As a VitalTalk trained faculty member and an experienced remote educator, Dr. Katie Stowers has been instrumental in helping VitalTalk build and deliver develop educationally sound, virtual programs. We are excited about this new direction and are forever grateful and for Dr. Stowers in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

**Kendra Mirasol**  
CEO | VitalTalk