



OHSU CENTER FOR ETHICS IN HEALTH CARE

Impact Report 2021



“

The challenges of this year, and the many rapid changes in health care that have followed, reinforce more than ever how essential it is to keep the patient—each unique human being—at the center of our care.

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SUSAN W. TOLLE, MD

Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair and Director, OHSU Center for Ethics in Health Care



If 2020 was challenging, 2021 has presented even more powerful opportunities to grow. The Center for Ethics in Health Care has responded with passionate commitment to use these opportunities to continue to find ways to improve health care for all, ensuring the patient is always the most important consideration in every aspect of care. This work happens on many levels: innovative education programs for current and future generations of health care professionals throughout the state; integrated policy and systems changes; and research and scholarship.

As you read on to learn more about the Center's work this year, please know how wholeheartedly we recognize that none of what we do would be possible without your unwavering dedication. We remain profoundly grateful for the support of our remarkable philanthropic community and the inspiration you bring to our work every day.

Susan

SUSAN W. TOLLE, MD
Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair
Director, OHSU Center for Ethics
in Health Care

Growing and Learning Through COVID-19

The Center for Ethics has continued to adapt and pivot to a world fundamentally changed by COVID-19. The pandemic has put a much-needed spotlight on several key areas in health care. Chief among these is the urgent need for changes in how we care for people with disabilities, frail elders and people from diverse populations experiencing health disparities — especially during times of serious illness. Dr. Susan Tolle's work with Senate Bill 1606 helped craft important legislation to assure that people with disabilities can have a support person with them in medical settings. The Center also produced a new video featuring Katie Stowers, DO, demonstrating compassionate communication skills with her "patient," Ian (who has a spinal cord injury) that puts a powerful focus on the need to put the patient first and the diagnosis second. This year's statewide **Kinsman Bioethics Conference** (delivered virtually and attracting record participation) addressed *Truth, Power, Justice: Bioethics as a Voice for Equity*. Response was overwhelmingly positive to the outstanding presenters and the importance of the issues.

Program in Compassionate Communication

Recruitment for the **Doris and Mark Storms Chair in Compassionate Communication**, unavoidably delayed during the early months of the pandemic, reached a unanimous conclusion this year with the selection of Cliff Coleman, MD, MPH, who began his new role on July 1, 2021. Dr. Coleman, who has led national innovations in health literacy, has an expansive vision for the program, and is eager to begin implementing and refining the Center's ambitious mission to improve communication with patients across all health care disciplines.

Serious Illness Education

Dr. Katie Stowers, the **Ronald W. Naito Director in Serious Illness**, has defied the limitations imposed by the pandemic to continue to build and expand communications training for both students and practicing professionals. 156 OHSU medical students were tested virtually this year — using video technology and actors as simulated patients — to assess their mastery in giving difficult news with compassion and respect, and without medical jargon. More recently, Dr. Stowers led an intensive team effort to adapt the VitalTalk training course to a virtual format. She expertly led 22 new faculty

members from numerous specialties across OHSU and the region through an intensive three-day training (with additional training to follow in October). This brings to 35 the number of Oregon clinicians who will soon be trained both in how to lead compassionate conversations with seriously ill patients and their families, and how to teach these vital skills to others in their area of specialty to create a ripple effect of skilled mentorship throughout the state. Response from VitalTalk leadership and statewide participants has been uniformly enthusiastic.



Continuing an inspirational legacy: Dr. Katie Stowers, the Ronald W. Naito Director in Serious Illness (pictured here with the late Dr. Naito) is honored to lead programs teaching the compassionate communication skills exemplified by Dr. Naito throughout his long medical career.

Professionalism and Comfort Care

Tyler Tate, MD, MA, **Director of Professionalism and Comfort Care funded by the Miles J. Edwards Endowment**, brought his customary creativity and passion to adapting this year's Living with Life-Threatening Illness course to a virtual format. Using video communication, first-year medical students learned about the experience of serious illness from dedicated patient-teachers, and from experts skilled in the art of caring for people who are seriously ill. More than 90% of this year's students rated this the best course in medical school or college. Statewide education programs have continued to flourish under Dr. Tate's leadership, with the virtual format for these interactive teaching programs enabling even higher participation from communities throughout Oregon. Dr. Tate has also made six new contributions to scholarship this year, exploring issues such as suffering and moral distress in articles published in several prestigious publications.

Ethics Education

Ethics education programs led by Lynn A. Jansen, PhD, RN, the inaugural **Madeline Brill Nelson Chair in Ethics Education**, have continued virtually this year and will convert to in-person in the fall. The popular and thought-provoking Daniel Labby Seminar in Medical Ethics, moderated by David Clarke, MD, explored challenging and timely topics, and the ethics modules created for pharmacy students were taught again online. Dr. Jansen has accepted an appointment at the University of Arizona; a national recruitment process is now underway to select the next Chair to lead these important programs.

Oregon POLST Program

It has been a very busy year for the Oregon POLST program. In October 2020 a new platform for the POLST Electronic Registry upgraded the technology to make form entry and retrieval more efficient. Not surprisingly during a pandemic year, the volume of information requests to the POLST Hotline was higher than ever. Quality improvements have continued to enhance the POLST program, including a reduction in the number of inappropriate POLST forms submitted by healthy 65-year-olds. A recent editorial by Dr. Susan Tolle in *The Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* shared key findings about best POLST practices, using data from 440,000 forms submitted to the Oregon POLST Registry. Supported by private philanthropy so it can retain an independent voice, the Oregon POLST Program continues to play a powerful role in developing innovations used by other POLST programs throughout the nation and the world.

Leadership

The issues exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have been a top priority for Dr. Susan Tolle, the **Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair**, as she has led the Center through a year of both considerable challenges and exciting growth opportunities. With a health system under more stress than ever before, the need to support those who are vulnerable — especially people with disabilities, people who are aging, and people struggling with mental illness — has been her primary focus. She has led the Center through a period of unprecedented growth to meet these needs through the expansion of the Program in Compassionate Communication. In addition, Dr. Tolle has devoted her time to legislative testimony to enact visitor policies for people with disabilities, policies to support staff and patients in the COVID era, changes at the systems level and awareness of critical issues in equity and justice.



Creating a powerful virtual classroom: Dr. Tyler Tate, Director of Professionalism and Comfort Care funded by the Miles J. Edwards Endowment, brings his passion for teaching to the screen, inspiring a new generation of physicians in the popular Living with Life-Threatening Illness course.



An exciting new beginning: Dr. Cliff Coleman, the inaugural Doris and Mark Storms Chair in Compassionate Communication, brings a big smile to his new role leading this ambitious and far-reaching program to make health care more compassionate and respectful for all.



Caring for the whole person: a video featuring a "patient," played by Ian (an actor who has a spinal cord injury) demonstrates the importance of communication skills that focus on the person first, and the diagnosis second.

We remain full of gratitude to all those who have made this work possible. Thank you.

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I never have to question a provider I trust.
I never have to ask myself ‘would I have received
different care if I didn’t use a wheelchair?’

”

IAN JACQUISS,

stressing the importance of compassionate, respectful care as
he reflects on his experience as a person with a spinal cord injury



Rejoicing in being together in person again:
Cornie Stevens and Dr. Susan Tolle, the
Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair, look back with
gratitude on their decades of shared passion
for the Center’s work and the many people
whose generosity has made it possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Susan W. Tolle, MD

Director, Center for Ethics in Health Care
503-494-4466 | ethics@ohsu.edu

Liz Arrington, CSPG

Senior Director of Development, OHSU Foundation
503-552-0716 | arringt1@ohsu.edu

OHSU Center for Ethics in Health Care
3181 SW Sam Jackson Park Rd., UHN-86
Portland, OR 97239-3098
ohsu.edu/center-for-ethics