

Catholic Health Ethics Internships: Lessons Learned From Five Years' Experience

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This presentation reviews five years' experience administering an ethics internship at Ascension St. Vincent. While the internship was originally designed for cultivating a pipeline of Catholic health care ethicists, most participants have come from medical students looking to gain experience and training in moral reasoning to aid in their clinical formation. Interns have come from academic institutions such as Saint Louis University, Indiana University, The Ohio State University, Marian University, with the majority coming from Marian University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Intern cohorts have typically included two interns working with ethics leadership over the course of a summer, though more recent experience included a larger cohort.

The internship has varied over time in terms of hours per week, compensation, and areas of focus. Experiences within the internship have focused on broad-based exposure to clinical and organizational operations within a large Catholic health system, such as ethics committee meetings, outreach meetings with local Catholic parishes, and shadowing various clinical disciplines. Interns have played an integral role in contributing to the work of the department on several projects, including developing and maintaining an ethics

SharePoint site, managing ethics consult data, cataloguing all institutional policies to aid in policy standardization, and starting new ethics integration committees.

Follow-up with interns after completion of the program is an important quality improvement component that has led to substantial changes and revisions to the program nearly every year. More recent efforts have been made to publicize and recruit for the internship as well as the Catholic health care ethics role at national events such as SEEK 2019, a gathering of 17,000 Catholic college students. In addition to the formal internship program, prospective and interested students have been encouraged to participate in the Proactive Ethics Integration program in an informal way, e.g., participating in ethics committee meetings and clinical ethics education sessions. This accessibility and awareness of the ethics internship among community and staff members have increased the number of quality referrals for the internship. Given demographic need, ethics internships are an important and easily achievable resource to help ensure a robust pipeline for quality Catholic health care ethicists and, even more so, for ethically-informed and -formed health care professionals, both clinical and non-clinical.

Our experience emphasizes that, if Catholic health care is committed to maintaining and fostering a vibrant Catholic identity and ethical culture into the future, such internships (including not only future ethicists but clinicians and administrators as well) should, and can, become more widespread across the nation. ✚

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