

Forum

ST. JOSEPH HEALTH SYSTEM

Center for Healthcare Ethics Launches Computer Bulletin Board

This past February, the Center for Healthcare Ethics, St. Joseph Health System, Orange, CA, went on line with its Healthcare Ethics Bulletin Board. The service allows members of the center to gain access to information, interact with others who have similar interests, request help on policy development, present and comment on case studies, and send and receive documents.

In introducing the bulletin board, St. Joseph Health System also announced that it was for the first time offering memberships in the center to inter-

ested individuals and institutions. As Coordinator Lauri Rogers explains, the new membership structure evolved in response to increasing requests from organizations and individuals outside of St. Joseph Health System. "As the requests for information and other resources increased," Rogers explains, "we wanted to provide a systematic and consistent response, so we developed a membership structure."

Center Director Jack Glaser came up with the idea of creating the

bulletin board in 1990.

For the next year and a half, the center's staff worked with bulletin board administrator Ray De La Cruz to give shape to the bulletin board and make it as user friendly as possible. "The present selection of subject areas will remain constant for some time," Glaser noted. "But we anticipate further evolution as we gather more experience and our members express their needs."

By early May, 175 individuals and 42 institutions had become members of the

center. Institutional membership fees are \$349 (one year), \$629 (two years), or \$889 (three years), with a 20 percent discount for Catholic health systems when a majority of members join. Individual memberships are \$39 (one year), \$69 (two years), or \$99 (three years) (see **Box**, below, for services).

First-time users are automatically placed in an introductory area from which they can access a description of available subject areas, view a listing of the center's member services, and get information on how to capture their on-line session to their computer. Regular users are immediately placed in the subject area they last used and informed whether

it has been updated since their last call. Users can also check to see if any personal messages have been left for them since their last time on line.

The Healthcare Ethics Bulletin Board gives members access to 17 different subject areas, two of which are "interactive." For instance, the "Public Forum" subject area allows members to request specific help or elicit comments from other users. The "Interactive Case Study" subject area allows users to offer perspectives on a sample case, ask questions, and share methods of ethical decision making.

In other subject areas, users can retrieve and print case studies on a variety of topics; view up-to-date information on AIDS; view synopses of current journal articles and articles on nursing ethics; and read summaries of local and national news items pertaining to healthcare ethics. The bulletin board also allows users to access information on global issues such as the environment and world health; and perspectives on how ethnic, cultural, and gender differences affect interpersonal relationships, decision making, and treatment choices. Another area provides information

MISSION

The mission of the Center for Healthcare Ethics is to create programs and materials for recognizing, analyzing, and resolving ethical problems at the individual, institutional, and societal levels.

MEMBER SERVICES

Institutional Members

- *Ethical Currents*—20 copies of an eight-page quarterly publication examining current ethical issues in depth
- *Western Bioethics Network*—20 copies of a bimonthly newsletter with up-to-date information on educational programs, new print and audiovisual materials, and research news
- *Ethical Dimensions*—a quarterly one-page newsletter that facilities can distribute to staff and physicians to increase the visibility of the ethics committee and raise consciousness concerning issues in healthcare ethics



**CENTER FOR
HEALTHCARE ETHICS**
A Service of St. Joseph Health System

- Educational modules—quarterly mailings including an original videotape with accompanying educational material, focusing on issues of special concern to ethics committees

- Unlimited access to the center's computer bulletin board

- Access to the center's video library

- Speakers' bureau listing to assist staff in arranging

educational programs

- Reduced fees for other center programs, materials, and services

Individual Members

- A subscription to *Ethical Currents*

- A subscription to *Western Bioethics Network*

- Unlimited access to the center's computer bulletin board

- Reduced fees for other center programs, materials, and services

on the development, evolution, limits, and possibilities of ethics committees.

For Sr. M. Margaret McDonnell, RSCJ, RN, a bioethics consultant from Winnetka, IL, the main attraction of the bulletin board is the time and money it saves her. "In my work," she explains, "I have to keep current on what's being published in the literature on ethics, which in the past meant subscribing to 'digest' journals that cost hundreds of dollars."

One of the first individuals to sign up for the service, Sr. McDonnell learned to navigate the system with the help of De La Cruz. She has already developed her own method for accessing and downloading files from

the bulletin board. "I call about once every two weeks and retrieve files from maybe five areas," she says.

Sr. McDonnell also found a more immediate use for the bulletin board when the chairperson of an ethics committee at one of her client hospitals asked her for assistance in addressing a dispute between an emergency room physician and nurse. Consulting the service, she quickly located an article in *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* that discussed how to differentiate clinical standards from criteria for making ethical decisions—exactly the information she needed.

According to Sr. McDonnell, the challenge for the Center for



Center for Healthcare Ethics Coordinator Lauri Rogers and Director Jack Glaser worked with other staff members to give the bulletin board shape and make it user friendly.

Healthcare Ethics will be to "keep the information coming and keep it current."

At present, members of the center's staff share responsibility for regularly updating files in various subject areas. As more members come on line, the cen-

ter hopes to find ways to spread the work around, possibly by developing a community of volunteers who, in exchange for free membership, will scan the literature in a specified area and summarize it for the bulletin board.

Persons interested in examining the the bulletin board can call 714-744-3251 and log on as GUEST USER. Guests are given 20 minutes to explore the system. For more information, call Ray De La Cruz at 714-997-4881, ext. 134.

HUMILITY OF MARY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

DOCS Link Speeds Physicians' Information Retrieval

Humility of Mary Information Systems (HMIS) offers Doctors Office Communication System (DOCS) Link, an on-line information retrieval system, to improve the information flow between the hospital and the physician. The physician can access patient and hospital information while at the hospital, home, or office.

DOCS Link is available to physicians who practice at three hospitals in the Lorain, OH-based Humility of Mary Health Care System (HMHCS). The Ohio hospitals are St. Elizabeth Hospital Medical Center, Youngstown; St. Joseph Hospital & Health Center, Lorain; and St. Joseph Riverside Hospital, Warren.

DOCS Link provides information on patients' insurance coverage and demographic characteristics, laboratory and radiology results, physician census lists, and other patient and hospital data.

Physicians using DOCS Link report that they have an increase in administrative productivity and a shorter billing cycle. They also have access to more timely information for clinical and financial data. The hospitals benefit from offering the service because they no longer have to provide those physicians with this information by mail or telephone.

Several years ago HMHCS hospitals placed terminals and printers on the nursing units and in physician lounges for physicians to use while at the hospital. But now physicians interested in accessing DOCS Link from

their offices or homes can request the services of the hospital's DOCS Link contact person.

The contact person determines what equipment the physician will need to access the hospital system. The necessary equipment includes a personal computer, printer, modem, and communications software package. Most physicians can adapt equipment they currently use in their practices. Average costs for additional hardware and software for the physicians' offices have been between \$150 and \$200.

A one-hour training session on how to use the remote application is available to physicians and their staffs. Physicians can also take a one-hour training session to learn how to use the hospitals' in-house application.

Each physician must sign a security agreement to ensure confidentiality is maintained. If questions or problems arise once the system is installed, the physician may call the HMIS Help Desk (staffed continually). Nearly 40 physician practices currently use DOCS Link. By the end of the year HMIS expect 75 physician practices to be using the service.

HMIS President and Chief Executive Officer Dennis Belter plans to soon provide additional functions and increase the amount of information available through DOCS Link. The hospitals and HMIS will work with physicians to refine and enhance the service.

