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Valley Medical Center Foundation achieves highest certification for nonprofit ethics

Only charity in California to earn Standards for Excellence Institute® “Seal of Excellence”

SAN JOSE - The Valley Medical Center Foundation has become the only nonprofit charity organization in California to achieve the Standards for Excellence Institute® “Seal of Excellence”, the nation’s highest level of accreditation for nonprofit governance and ethics. The designation comes after a year-long process to test compliance with **Standards for Excellence®: An Ethics and Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector**, with specific measures for honesty, integrity, fairness, respect, trust, responsibility and accountability.

“The number one commodity we have is donor trust,” said VMC Foundation CEO Chris Wilder. “We felt the best way to honor that trust was to put ourselves to the test and see if we are worthy of it. And we just aced that test.”

The process to achieve the accreditation was exhaustive, involving the entire VMC Foundation Board of Directors and staff. And that is by design. The full scope of the organization was tested, well beyond the annual audit typical of most nonprofit organizations. To do so, the Standards for Excellence Institute® drew upon its cohort of 80 licensed consultants and 100 volunteer nonprofit professionals to review all aspects of the VMC Foundation’s governance and operations. That included an examination of financial policies, employment policies, strategic plan and code of ethics. It also measured how prepared the organization is for the unexpected, from a natural disaster to sudden departure of the CEO.

“This is about making sure that we have systems in place that will guide the organization no matter who works here,” said Wilder. “This is ultimately about protecting our donors’ money. Good intentions only go so far. We want to institutionalize systems and a culture that promotes transparency and integrity in all that we do.”

As part of the compliance process, over 25 new policies were drafted and approved by the VMC Foundation Board of Directors, with the application itself comprising 649 pages of content. The process touched on issues such as diversity, gender discrimination and racism that are roiling many American workplaces.

“I’m most proud of our new Cultural Humility Policy that address head-on our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion,” said Wilder. “That came out of this process, and we are a much stronger organization for it.”

Though the VMC Foundation is an independent agency, its mission is to serve as the fundraising arm of the County of Santa Clara Health System and its flagship public hospital, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. Those are public entities and subject to meticulous oversight. Wilder wanted the same for the VMC Foundation.

“Our work reflects on the County of Santa Clara and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center,” said Wilder. “We have to be held to a high standard.”

This achievement would not have been possible without the support of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, which worked directly with the Standards for Excellence Institute® to promote the accreditation program to Silicon Valley organizations.

“The Markkula Center reviewed programs nationwide before becoming a replication partner for the Standards for Excellence Institute,” said Joan Harrington, Assistant Director of Social Sector Ethics at the Markkula Center. “This is the most rigorous and meaningful certification program in the social sector. We are so pleased that the VMC Foundation stepped up as a leader in Silicon Valley.”

The Markkula Center is keen on seeing more organizations apply as a way to strengthen the local nonprofit sector, and to give potential donors a new tool to seek out philanthropy partners. Wilder hopes to support that effort.

“Volvo famously did not patent their seatbelt,” Wilder said. “I hope to share lessons learned with other organizations and help them apply, because we want to send a message to our donor community that the nonprofit sector in Silicon Valley is driven by the highest standards for ethics.”

About Valley Medical Center Foundation

The Valley Medical Center Foundation is an independent, community-driven 501c3 nonprofit organization founded to support Silicon Valley’s most vital public health institution – Santa Clara Valley Medical Center Hospitals & Clinics. In partnership with SCVMC, the VMC Foundation raises philanthropic dollars to improve existing services, pioneer new models of care, and advance the cause of high quality healthcare for all. To learn more, visit www.vmcfoundation.org.

About Standards for Excellence Institute®

The Standards for Excellence® originated as a special initiative of Maryland Nonprofits in 1998 and has since expanded into a national program to help nonprofit organizations achieve the highest benchmarks of ethics and accountability in nonprofit governance, management and operations. The program is offered by eleven state, regional and national affiliate organizations, and is supported by nearly 80 Licensed Consultants and over 100 volunteers with professional experience in nonprofit governance and administration. Since its inception, the program has accredited or recognized over 200 individual nonprofit organizations that completed a rigorous application and review process to demonstrate adherence to the *Standards for Excellence®: An Ethics and Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector*.

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