

Clinician Conversation Guide

An approach to discussing what matters most with a seriously ill person



GRATITUDE AND CHECK IN

"Hi, my name is _____. I am a doctor/nurse/social worker on your team. Thank you for taking time to talk to me today. How are you doing?"

PURPOSE

"I'd like to spend time today sharing information and also hearing about any concerns you may have about your illness. This will guide us in knowing how to best care for you. Is this okay?"

EXPLORE UNDERSTANDING

"I've read your chart. However, it's helpful to hear directly from you. What is your understanding of where things are at **now** with your illness?" OR "What have the other doctors told you is going on with your illness right **now**?"

VALIDATE

"You have a great understanding of what's going on. I have the same understanding as you do."

OR

RELAY

"Thank you for sharing that. Would it be okay if I share some information?" *[relay information]*

"While I'm hoping for the best, I'm worried that even with (more) treatment for your _____ you may continue to get weaker over time and I think it's important to plan for that possibility. Can we discuss this now?"

OR

REFRAME

"Thank you for sharing that. Would it be okay if I share some information? I'm worried we're in a different place now. At this point there are unfortunately no additional treatments to likely help you get stronger."

Pause for emotion and respond with empathy (e.g., "I can't imagine how upsetting this must be to think about." OR "I wish things were different.")

MAP OUT VALUES AND GOALS

"Given this news, have you ever had conversations with anyone about what would be most important to you if you got sicker?"

"What would you be **hoping** for if your condition worsens or if time were short?"

"What **worries** might you or your loved ones have as you think about (the possibility of) getting sicker?"

"Is there anything else that comes to mind as you think about your future?"

ALIGN

"What I'm hearing is most important to you is _____ and that you're concerned about _____. Did I get that right?"

PLAN

"Based on what matters most to you, and based on my understanding of what's to come, would it be okay if I make a recommendation?"

"I recommend the following..... *[say what you will do before what you will not do]*. How does this plan sound to you?"

KEEP THE DOOR OPEN

"Thank you for taking the time to have this conversation today. I'll update your chart and follow up *[say when]*."

Visit theconversationlab.org to learn more.



© 2021. This material has been modified by the University Health Network in association with its educational initiative to improve serious illness care, The Conversation Lab. The original content can be found from two programs: www.ariadnelabs.org and is licensed by Ariadne Labs: A Joint Center for Health Systems Innovation (ariadnelabs.org) at Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 (2017-4-18) and VitalTalk (vitaltalk.org). All rights reserved. For educational use only. Do not reproduce without permission.



Toronto General
Toronto Western
Toronto Rehab
Michener Institute