

Serious Illness Conversation Guide

CONVERSATION FLOW

PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE

1. Set up the conversation

- Introduce purpose
- Prepare for future decisions
- Ask permission

"I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want — **is this okay?**"

2. Assess understanding and preferences

"What is your **understanding** now of where you are with your illness?"

"How much **information** about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"

3. Share prognosis

- Share prognosis
- Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement
- Allow silence, explore emotion

"I want to share with you **my understanding** of where things are with your illness..."

Uncertain: "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I **hope** you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm **worried** that you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that possibility."

OR

Time: "I **wish** we were not in this situation, but I am **worried** that time may be as short as ___ (express as a range, e.g. days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year)."

OR

Function: "I **hope** that this is not the case, but I'm **worried** that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."

4. Explore key topics

- Goals
- Fears and worries
- Sources of strength
- Critical abilities
- Tradeoffs
- Family

"What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?"

"What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?"

"What gives you **strength** as you think about the future with your illness?"

"What **abilities** are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?"

"If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of gaining more time?"

"How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?"

5. Close the conversation

- Summarize
- Make a recommendation
- Check in with patient
- Affirm commitment

"I've heard you say that ___ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I **recommend** that we ___. This will help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you."

"How does this plan seem to you?"

"We will do everything we can to help you through this."

6. Document your conversation

7. Communicate with key clinicians

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