



Serious Illness Conversation Communication Tips

- Encourage residents/families to ask questions to create a comfortable open environment for discussion.
- Create a listening conversation and let the residents/families speak 50% of the time.
- Explore residents' understanding of their health status including their diagnoses, treatments, and prognosis.
- Inquire about residents' personal values and wishes concerning care options if their medical condition worsens.
- Explore residents' fears and worries about the future of their health.
- Use an inclusive approach and ask residents what you need to know about them to provide them the best care possible.
- Validate to residents/families that their concerns are real and normal; this can help people feel listened to.
- In discussing prognosis, use imaginary "future scenarios" to discuss a worsening trajectory that residents/families may experience.
- Do not use medical jargons, instead use plain language.
- Avoid providing false reassurance but use empathic statements and therapeutic silence to respond to residents' emotions.
- Avoid your own values and preferences from guiding your discussion with residents.
- Make conversations about serious illness a team effort involving all members of the healthcare team.
- Develop a personalized serious illness care plan for each resident based on what is important to them.

References:

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Use the following mnemonic devices to help with serious illness conversations:

AFIRM

Acknowledge the concern.

Find out what they already know and understand, filter out what is important.

Immediate concern: address what is most pressing.

Respond to as many questions as possible under the circumstances.

Meeting: set up a meeting at another time with appropriate professionals, for concerns that cannot be addressed in the moment ('get out of jail free' card).

NURSE

Naming – Identify emotion by its name e.g., anger

Understanding – Confirm your appreciation of their feeling

Respecting – affirm that their reaction is important

Supporting – Provide various sources of support

Exploring – Ask specific questions and show your interest in their emotion

SPIKES

A six-step protocol for communicating at end of life

Setting up the meeting, being prepared.

Perception: find out what the person knows.

Invitation: ask permission to discuss specific topics.

Knowledge and information to the patient: tell them what they ask to know.

ASK: what they want to know

TELL: them what they've asked for

ASK: them what they've understood

Empathy: address emotions with empathic responses.

Strategy and summary: what is the plan moving forward, are they in agreement.



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