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HOT TIP
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Northern Health Palliative Care

Approach to End-of-Life Care: Serious Illness Conversation Guide

As patients approach the end of life, effective communication about goals of care and planning is a key element in helping assure that patients receive the care they want, alleviating anxiety and helping families. Effective communication supports end-of-life care and quality of life throughout the illness trajectory, even if death is not an imminent outcome.

CONVERSATION FLOW	PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE
1. Set Up the Conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce purpose Ask permission Prepare for future decisions 	<i>"I'd like to talk about what's ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what's important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want – is this okay?"</i>
2. Assess Understanding and Preferences	<i>"What's your understanding now of where you are with your illness?"</i>
3. Share Prognosis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share prognosis Allow silence, explore emotion Frame as a "wish...worry", "hope...worry" statement 	<i>"I want to share with you my understanding of where things are with your illness..." OR "I hope that this is not the case but I'm worried this may be as strong as you'll feel and things are likely to get more difficult."</i>
4. Explore Key Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals Fears and worries Sources of strength Critical abilities Tradeoffs Family 	<i>"What are your most important goals if your health situation worsens?" OR "What are your biggest fears and worries about the future with your health?" OR "How much does your family know about your priorities and wishes?"</i>
5. Close the Conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize Make a recommendation Check in with patient Affirm commitment 	<i>"I've heard you say that ___ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I recommend we _____. This will help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you. How does this plan seem to you?"</i>
6. Document your Conversation	
7. Communicate with Key Clinicians	

Reference: BC Centre for Palliative Care (2017, April). Serious Illness Conversation Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.bc-cpc.ca/cpc/serious-illness-conversations/>