

Conversation Starters in Palliative Approach to Care

For health-care providers

Before having a serious illness conversation educate yourself on the patient's illness, possible trajectory, and likely prognosis.

Learn to manage emotions with empathy

Expect conversations to be emotional. Avoid pushing medical facts or information on emotions or resistance, and meet emotions by articulating empathy.

3 Ws (I wish- I worry-I wonder):

I wish that this was not the case. **I worry** your health is going to change quickly and **wonder** about preparing for that possibility.

I wish that treatment worked. Or **I wish** you were not in this situation.

I worry that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things might get worse, and that time may be as short as __ (weeks/days).

I wonder if we can discuss how best we can meet your needs now.

NURSE:

Naming emotion: It sounds like you are ____.

Understanding: Thanks for sharing. It helps me understand what you are thinking/feeling more.

Respecting: I can see you are following our recommendations.

Support: I will do everything I can to ensure you get what you need.

Exploring: Could you tell me more about what you mean when you said ____.

Initiate dialogue

Ask for the patient's permission, identify who else they would like to include, and when and where would make them most comfortable.

In my experience, most patients want me to discuss what might happen in the future with their illness. Others are not interested. Would this be a good time to discuss your illness? (When would be a good time to discuss your illness?)

Explore understanding of the illness

Use open-ended questions. There may be silence as the patient thinks, give them time and remain quiet until they respond.

How much information about your health would you like from me?

What do you think about what's happening with your health right now?

Then, reflect back on what the patient tells you to ensure you understand their perspective.

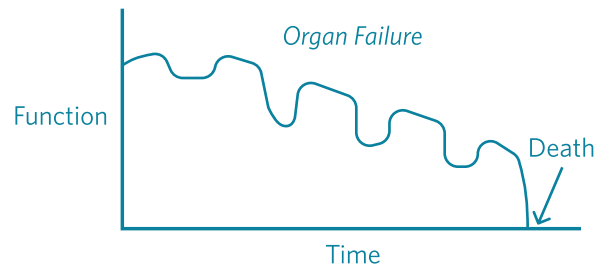
Provide illness education

With the patient's permission, slowly and clearly explain the diagnosis and its life-limiting effects in plain language.

This is my understanding of where things are at right now...

Visuals help, especially trajectories.

Proposed Trajectories of Dying



Identify goals and values

Develop a deeper understanding of the patient beyond their medical conditions and social status.

If your health gets worse, what's important to you?

When you think about the future, is there anything you worry about?

What gives you strength through the hard times?

What do I need to know about you to give you the best care possible?

What do I need to know about your culture to give you the best care possible?

If your health gets worse, how much are you willing to go through for the possibility of more time?

Create a plan with the patient

Summarize → **Recommend** → **Feedback** → **Affirm** → **Revisit**

This is what I heard you say...

I suggest that we ___.

How does the plan seem to you?

As part of your health team, I will do all I can to help you get the best care possible.

If you think of anything else later, we can revisit this conversation another time.