

COMMUNICATION PHRASES NEAR END-OF-LIFE

Determining Decision Making Capacity

- Will you describe your current condition? What have the doctors told you?
- Tell me the options for treating “X” you’ve discussed.
- Explain to me why you feel that way?

Quality of Life – to understand illness’s impact

- How has your disease interfered with daily activities; your family and friends?
- Have you been worried or sad about your illness?
- What symptoms bother or concern you most?
- How have your religious beliefs been affected?
- Many patients wonder about the meaning of all this - Do you?

Prognosis

- Tell me how you spend your day; how much time do you spend lying down or resting – is it more than 50% of the time; has this changed recently?
- Has anyone talked with your about what to expect?
- Do you have a sense of how much time is left? Is this something you would like to talk about?
- Although I can’t give you an exact time, in general, pts. with your condition live __ wks/mos to __ wks/mos.

Goals of Care/Goal Setting

- With your current condition, what is most important for you right now? What are you hoping for? What do you hope to avoid?
- What are expecting for the time you have left? What are you afraid might happen?
- What are your goals for this last phase of your life?

Cross-Cultural – Understanding others views of illness

- I know different people have very different ways of understanding illness. Please help me understand how you see things? Do you want to know a lot or a little?
- Tell me what you think the illness does; what is the natural course? What do you fear?
- How do you think the sickness should be treated? How do you want us to help you?

Giving Bad News – 6 steps (Buckman method)

1. Prepare yourself and setting.
2. Find out what patient knows.
3. Find out how much patient want to know.
4. Share information; use “warning shot”, use simple language, small chunks of information; check understanding along the way.
5. Respond to emotion.
6. Discuss plan and follow-through.

Responding to Emotion

1. Reflect thoughts, emotions or behavior:
 - You seem very ...
 - I see that you are crying...
2. Affirmation and respect:
 - Thank you for describing your feelings/thoughts.
 - I can do a better job as your doctor when I know how you are feeling.
 - Please tell me more about the sadness you are feeling.
3. Summarize/paraphrase:
 - Let me see if I can summarize what you have said, then you can let me know if I’m on track...
4. Dealing with anger;
 - You appear angry; can you tell me what is upsetting you?
 - So you are telling me that you are angry about ____, is that correct?
 - I wish things were different...How can I help?

Speaking with Family after a Death

- I wish there is more we could have done; I’m very sorry for your loss. This must be very difficult for you; is there anyone I can call for you?
- In the days to weeks to come, please contact me if I can answer any questions about your (relation’s) illness.

Adapted by Matthew Ellman, MD from MCW Research Foundation, Inc.