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 you 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.

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