

Directing Your Life: A Conversation Guide

“Patients have goals and priorities besides (just) living longer. Learning about them empowers you to provide better care.”

The Serious Illness Care Program, Ariadne Labs

This guide is intended to assist medical providers in having conversations with people who have a serious illness. The purpose is to allow effective collaboration with patients and families on the creation of a plan of care that is consistent with the patient’s goals and the clinical reality. It can be used as both a checklist and a script for what can be difficult conversations. With experience, medical providers will often develop their own style, while still following the general format of this guide.

Useful Tips

- Follow the guide while you are learning it
- Sit down and make eye contact
- *Ask-Tell-Ask* (engage patient by asking a question first)
- Listen
- Talk less than half the meeting
- **Authenticity** – make a connection if possible
- Allow silence

S Set Up

- “I’d like to talk about what we can expect with regard to your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want – **is this okay?**”
- “So that I am sure to cover everything important, I will be using this guide as we speak.”

P Perception

- “What is your **understanding** of where things stand now with your medical situation?”

I Information

- “How much **information** about what you can expect with your illness would you like to know?”
- “I would like to share with you **my understanding** about your current medical condition. Would that be okay?”

K Knowledge

- Share Prognosis
- Frame as “wish/worry”
- Allow silence

- **Life expectancy (Time):** “I **wish** we were not in this situation, but I am **worried** that your time may be as short as _____ (express as a range of days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year).”
- **Function:** “I **hope** this is not the case, but I **worry** that you will have ups and downs with this condition, and the trend will be toward losing more and more of your ability to function (i.e. organ system failure).”
- **Uncertainty:** “There is a lot of uncertainty here, but I am **worried** that you will continue to have complications and that things are going to get more difficult for you (or your loved one) over time with this disease (i.e. dementia, frailty).”

E Emotion/ Response

- N = Name
- U = Understanding
- R = Respect
- S = State intention
- E = Explore the emotion

- “I can tell this is making you really sad.”
- “This is really difficult to think about.”
- “You have fought this cancer so hard.”
- “No matter what happens, we will do our best to help you get through this.”
- “Please tell me more about what you are feeling right now.”

G Goals/ Explore

- Fears and worries
- Sources of strength
- Critical abilities
- Tradeoffs
- Family

- “What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?”
- “What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?”
- “What gives you **strength** as you think about the future with your illness?”
- “What **abilities** are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?”
- “If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of gaining more time?”
- “How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?”

O Options/ Opinions

- Close the conversation
- Summarize
- Make a recommendation
- Check in with patient
- Affirm commitment

- “I've heard you say that ____ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and with what we know about your illness, I **recommend** that 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 will do everything I can to help you through this.”

D Decisions/ Plans

- Document conversation
- Communicate with key clinicians

- “Based on our decisions today, I recommend completion of these documents:
 - South Carolina Physician Order for Scope of Treatment (POST)
 - South Carolina Healthcare Power of Attorney”

This guide was created as a modification of Ariadne Labs “Serious Illness Conversation Guide,” 2015-2017



Spartanburg Regional
Healthcare System

MAKING ADVANCE CARE PLANS, **TOGETHER.**

DIRECTING YOUR LIFE.