

Physician's Guide to the Advance Care Planning Process

How to prepare for the discussion

1. **Evaluate your own goals** for discussion with patient and family based on patient history and current medical condition.

Things you want to think about...

- How well do you know this patient?
- Who should be present for the conversation?
- Is serious illness or death imminent?
- Do specific plans/treatments need to be discussed?
- Is the patient's overall health good? If so, what future goals can be discussed? If the patient's health is poor, what should be discussed immediately? When should the next conversation be scheduled?

Structuring your discussion with patient and family

2. **Ask patient and family members to explain what they think ACP means**

- What are their goals, feelings, fears?
- What are their questions?
- Have they been through this process before?

3. **Explain the purpose of ACP conversations**

- Discuss goals of care (current and future decision-making)
- Inquire about patient and family preferences at end-of-life
(Pain management, hospital vs. home, etc.)

4. **Establish clear healthcare goals**

- Discuss the balance between treatments and quality-of-life
- Determine how the doctor and medical community can help the patient achieve healthcare goals

Conversation Starters

- ~I would really like to get to know more about you and your values so that we can work together to develop some goals for your care.
- ~How do you feel about your health right now? Do you have any concerns about it?
- ~Do you have any concerns about your health and medical care in the future?
- ~Which activities are most important to you?
- ~If you became very sick, what services could help you continue to do those activities?
- ~Can you tell me about the type of balance you would want if you had to choose between living longer or doing certain activities?
- ~ What do you hope for your family?

*More conversation starters and concepts for the patient to discuss with their provider and family can be seen in the Compassion and Choices Values Worksheet ^[1]

Other Considerations

1. Family Conflicts

Advance Care Planning can be a sensitive subject for patients and their families. You may encounter family conflicts.

Some things to consider...

- Are the patient's wishes being advocated for?
- Is there a way to bring the family to consensus?
- If there is significant conflict, referral to a social worker/therapist may be the best solution.

* More information about resolving family conflicts can be found at:

-Responding to Emotions in Family Meetings, *Fast Facts and Concepts*

http://www.eperc.mcw.edu/EPERC/FastFactsIndex/ff_224.htm

-The Family Meeting: Causes of Conflict, *Fast Facts and Concepts*

http://www.eperc.mcw.edu/EPERC/FastFactsIndex/ff_225.htm.

2. Cultural Differences

We live in an increasingly multi-cultural society in which there can be cultural differences around:

- acceptance and desire for life-sustaining treatments
- trust in medical professionals/the health care system
- willingness to discuss end-of-life choices
- beliefs about who should make decisions about care for the elderly (designation of a healthcare proxy may be the best alternative)

*More information about understand cultural differences can be found at:

-Stanford Ethno-Geriatric Modules

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnoger/>

-“The African-American Spiritual and Ethical Guide to End-of-Life Care” by Gloria Thomas Anderson^[2] A copy is on file.

4. LGBTQ Considerations

Currently, Pennsylvania does not legally recognize same-sex marriages and domestic partnerships. It is particularly important for LGBTQ patients to understand how this can affect their end-of-life planning.

Some things to consider...

- To avoid family or legal conflicts, does the patient need to provide written documentation about the role they want their partner to have in their end-of-life care?
- The patient may need to sign a form permitting non-family members to visit if they are admitted to the hospital. Compassion and Choices has a template for this type of form at:
<http://www.compassionandchoices.org/userfiles/Hospital-Visitation-Form.pdf>
- Will hormone treatments have any effect on future treatments?

4. Religious/Spiritual Considerations

Religious and spiritual beliefs can be a large part of a patient and their family's ACP choices. It is important to know whether or not these are important to them.

Some things to consider...

- Do your patient/family's spiritual beliefs affect how they think about and plan for the end-of-life?
- In what ways can their beliefs help to guide the planning process?
- Should the patient/family seek additional support and guidance from clergy?

* The HOPE mnemonic can be used to learn more about your patient's beliefs^[3]

Resources

- 1) Compassion and Choices Values Worksheet
<http://www.compassionandchoices.org/userfiles/Values-Worksheet.pdf>
- 2) Thomas Anderson, G. (2013). Jackson, T. (Ed.), *The african-american spiritual and ethical guide to end-of-life care* (7th ed.) Heart Tones.
- 3) Anandarajah, G., & Hight, E. (2001). Spirituality and medical practice: Using the HOPE questions as a practical tool for spiritual assessment. *American Family Physician*, 63(1), 81-89.