

A guide for initiating advance care planning conversations with your patients

Importance of advance care planning conversations

Advance care planning is all about patients expressing their values and wishes and talking about the kind of healthcare they would want—or not want—if they became unable to speak for themselves. It is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing process that begins and evolves with a series of conversations. As a care manager, you can play an important role by initiating these conversations and guiding patients through this process.

Common barriers to conversations

Research has shown that while almost everyone knows they *should* have advance care planning conversations, only a small percentage of people have talked with their loved ones or healthcare providers about their wishes for end-of-life care.^{1,2}



Barriers for patients

- There are too many other things to worry about²
- They (or their loved ones) don't want to talk about death or dying²
- They don't believe the time is right²
- They don't know what kind of care they want or what questions to ask³
- They don't realize that they have options or that their preferences matter³

Barriers for healthcare providers

- There is not enough time during patient encounters^{4,5}
- They are uncomfortable with the topic or uncertain about what to say^{4,5}
- They believe it may cause patients to think all hope is lost^{4,5}
- They worry about making patients or family members upset or uncomfortable⁴
- They lack formal training or processes for initiating conversations⁵

Triggers for advance care planning conversations

Routine

- When you first meet a patient
- When a patient or family members request it
- During routine discussions of diagnosis and treatment options
- During a transitional care-management or a chronic-care-management visit

Urgent

- When a poor or life-limiting prognosis is presented
- Whenever there are difficult decisions to be made
- When there is an unexpected change in health status
- When the patient experiences declining or fluctuating mental capacity

Conversation starters

Assess patient readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you heard about advance care planning?• Have you thought about the type of treatment you would want if you could not speak for yourself?• Have you ever shared your healthcare wishes with a loved one or anyone else?
Obtain permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you feel you can talk with me now?• Would you be okay if we talked here?
Gauge whether others should be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there anyone you think should be here with us?• Would you like me to help you talk with your family about this?• May I share this information with your family, doctor, nurse, etc?
Assess the patient's knowledge about his or her current health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your understanding of your health now?• Do you have any concerns about your current care/treatments?• What information do you need to help you make decisions about your healthcare?

References

1. The Conversation Project. *When It Comes to End-of-Life Care, Talking Matters*. https://theconversationproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/TCP_TriFold_Brochure_0815.pdf. Published 2015. Accessed December 11, 2017. 2. California HealthCare Foundation. *Final Chapter: Californians' Attitudes and Experiences With Death and Dying*. <https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/PDF-FinalChapterDeathDying.pdf>. Published February 2012. Accessed February 20, 2018. 3. California State University Institute for Palliative Care, Coalition for Compassionate Care of California. *Advance Care Planning: A Guide for Healthcare Professionals*. <https://csupalliativecare.org/programs/advance-care-planning/ebook-2017/>. Accessed December 28, 2017. 4. Lower Cape Fear Hospice & Life Care Center. Provider resources. <http://www.begintheconversation.org/provider-resources/>. Accessed December 27, 2017. 5. PerryUdem Research/Communication; for the John A. Hartford Foundation, Cambia Health Foundation, California HealthCare Foundation. *Physicians' Views Toward Advance Care Planning and End-of-Life Care Conversations*. https://www.johnhartford.org/images/uploads/resources/ConversationStopper_Poll_Memo.pdf. Published April 2016. Accessed February 20, 2018.

The information in this guide should not replace the directions and advice of the healthcare provider.

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