



...at the end of life



## TOPIC 2

### CONVERSATIONS WITH MEDICAL STAFF

Preparing for conversations with medical staff when facing the end of one's life can be emotional and challenging. However, this is important as it ensures that the end-of-life person's medical care, wishes and concerns are fully understood and respected. Such dialogue ensures that care is aligned with the wishes of the person in an end-of-life situation and fosters a three-way relationship among patient, medical staff, and relatives. For the person who is end-of-life and those supporting them it is worth taking some time to reflect on mutual goals, values, and preferences for end-of-life care. Consider what matters most to the person in terms of quality of life, pain management, and treatment options.

Asking questions and holding conversations with medical professionals helps inform end-of-life options, enables a shared understanding, and eliminates potential misunderstanding. A transparent, honest, and sensitive approach to communication creates a platform for a more empathetic and personalised approach where every voice: patient, medical staff, and relative is heard and respected.

#### TRY THIS

Preparing in advance of your appointment with a medical professional is important. You can identify your wishes, concerns, and questions you want to get across so that you can receive information that best supports your options moving forward. This will enable you to inform the medical staff when you are scheduling the appointment. Preparation for your engagement with medical staff can be done with a trusted person who can support you during the appointment and in the choices you make afterward.

With your trusted person take a moment to reflect on what is most important to you regarding your end-of-life choices and create a list of your concerns and goals for the appointment.

- If you are not familiar with medical terms, take the time to research and understand them. This will enable you to communicate more effectively with the medical staff. Develop a list of questions about your health, possible treatments, implications of each option, etc., to ensure you do not forget anything during the conversation.
- Practice how you will express your preferences clearly and concisely, including any wishes regarding palliative care, advance directives, etc.
- Consider the various reactions the medical staff might have to your preferences to better prepare for discussions.
- Practice expressing your feelings openly and honestly, contributing to an open communication environment.
- During this appointment, take notes to ensure you understand all the information provided by the medical staff.



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## REFLECTIONS

- Advance preparation will allow you to maximise your time with the medical staff and avoid forgetting important issues.
- Do not hesitate to ask questions to clarify when medical terms used seem complicated to you.
- Open-ended questions can stimulate more in-depth conversations and provide you with a fuller understanding of the situation.
- Explain your preferences, you can use concrete examples of situations you might encounter which will make your requirements more tangible.

As a patient, you have rights:

- the right to clear and comprehensive information about your health condition, available treatments, possible alternatives, etc.
- the right to informed consent.
- the right to confidentiality.
- the right to refuse treatment.
- access to your medical records.
- the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of your origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or any other personal characteristic.
- the right to a second opinion.
- the right to report or complain in case of a violation of your rights.

Be aware that medical professionals are not always trained to communicate in a compassionate and transparent manner.

Therefore, initiating the conversation with pre-prepared questions is essential. Feel free to refer to your primary care physician if you have a stronger trust relationship for answering your questions or mediating with the consulting specialists.

## TRAINER TIPS

- The session can begin with a roundtable discussion on concerns and the sharing of experiences to personalise the training session and allow for practical scenarios.
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- Emphasise the importance of knowing patient rights. Take the time to explain these rights collectively during the session.
- Use realistic scenarios to simulate communication situations with medical staff. Encourage participants to practice how they would approach these scenarios, such as poor communication or unfavorable attitudes from the medical staff.
- Consider incorporating a stress management exercise (deep breathing, mental preparation) as these situations can be highly stressful.
- Highlight the significance of considering cultural and linguistic diversity in communication with medical personnel.



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