

Palliative Care Points of Conversation

Taken from: *Palliative Care and the Human Connection: Ten Steps for What to Say and Do*
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Step 1: Research & preparation

- Know your patient, the medical situation, prognosis, options, pros and cons
- Communicate with patient & family that they will be invited to an important meeting and the right people need to be in the room

Step 2: Readyng the space

- Use a room with a door that closes and is quiet
- Arrange furniture in a circle so people are facing each other
- Pitcher of water, cups, and Kleenex

Step 3: Introductions and ground rules

- Go around the room, have people introduce themselves and state their relationship to the patient
- Inform them everyone will have a chance to speak
- When one is speaking, they should not be interrupted

Step 4: Listen to what they know

- Ask what other physicians have told them

Step 5: Ask, Tell, Ask: Part I – “Ask”

- Ask how they like to get information – full details, basics
- This gives you permission to tell them and gives them power and control over the exchange of information

Step 6: Ask, Tell, Ask: Part II – “Tell”

- Possible script: “I’m sorry to have to tell you Mrs. Jones, but your PET scan has shown a progression of”
- Once bad news is delivered, STOP TALKING. They will not hear anything more.
- Listen to their reaction, affirm this is upsetting

Step 7: Ask, Tell, Ask: Part III – “Ask”

- Possible script: “Sometimes I tend to use big words that are medical, I want to be sure you understood, can you explain back to me what you understood from what I said?”

Step 8: Answering difficult questions

- May ask you, “What next?”, “Will I die?”
- Answer, “Yes, barring some unforeseen event.” (You are only validating what they already know and fear deep inside).

Step 9: Explain the options (Pros & Cons)

- This is where your preliminary homework is beneficial

Step 10: Write down what was said

- Write options, draw diagrams, etc.
- Provide a contact number where and hours when they may reach you
- Give this paper to the family. (This is a transitional object which they relate back to you and the reality of the conversation). Shake or hold their hand in closing if appropriate.