

## **Summary of ELNEC Guidelines for Navigating Difficult Conversation during Global Pandemic**

It is important to provide patients with clear, concise and accurate information so they can synthesize the information and make informed choices. Providing patients with a sense of control can help decrease their anxiety and lead to discussions about meaning of life.

Focusing on questions that address the patient's goals of care while also serving to gain information about the patient can be useful. Reassure family members that they are deciding about what is in the best interests of the patient, not necessarily what is in their own best interests.

When dealing with decisions that need to be made, work to achieve a common understanding of the issue. Begin with open-ended assessments and then turn to specific interventions, if necessary. Seek consensus whenever possible, agreeing on the decision or on the need for more information. Offer clear recommendations based on patient and family goals. Check for understanding of the decisions made by saying something like, "I want to make sure everyone understands what we've decided to do."

### **Questions for Patients:**

- "Please tell me about you and life before COVID-19 became a pandemic."
- "What matters the most to you right now?"
- "What concerns you most right now?" "What are you most afraid of?"
- "What activities such as music, art, reading, provide you peace and comfort?"
- "What are the most important relationships in your life?"
- "Is there anyone you rely on to help you make important decisions?"
- "How have you handled stress in the past?"

### **Questions for Families when the patient can't make their own decisions:**

- "Tell me about your loved one. What is important to him/her?"
- "What have you been told about [the patient's] condition?"
- "Is there anything that isn't clear that we can help to explain?"

### **Elicit Patient and Family Values and Goals, Focus on the Patient's perspectives:**

- "What is your understanding of this virus and your diagnosis?"
- "What information do you need right now?"
- "Given what's gone on, what are your hopes for [the patient]?"
- "What should I know about [the patient] beliefs and practices to take the best care of them?"
- "What do you imagine [the patient] would have done or wanted in this situation?"

### **Communicating about Stress and Hope:**

- "What do you hope for?"
- "What makes you lose hope? What can I do for you during those moments?"
- "What gives you hope or strength? How does this hope help or hinder you?"
- "What makes life worth living?"
- "Is there anything you haven't done that you need to do?"
- "What are you most proud of in your life? "
- "Are you at peace?"

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### Communicating a sense of urgency:

1. Knowing you want the best for [the patient], if the condition becomes severe, and they almost certainly will die, would they still want to come to the hospital or stay at home?
2. If [the patient] was able to understand what is happening with the COVID-19 virus, what would they say about treatment choices?
3. This is not the kind of decisions anyone wants to make. Would [the patient] believe in you to speak for them?
4. I wish things were different, but can we plan for what kind of care you want no matter what happens while also planning for the worst? Where are you leaning?
5. I'm so sorry to share that [the patient's] condition is so bad that they are not going to make it.

### Resources for Communication During COVID-19:

Adapted from Rabow, M.W., Hauser, J.M., & Adams, J. (2004). Supporting family caregivers at the end of life: "They don't know what they don't know." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 291(4), 487)

Olsman, E., Leget, C., & Willems, D. (2015). Palliative care professionals' evaluations of the feasibility of a hope communication tool: A pilot study. *Progress in Palliative Care*, 23(6), 321-325.

Herth, K. (1992). Abbreviated instrument to measure hope: development and psychometric evaluation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 17, 1251-1259

Source: Adapted from Baird P. Spiritual care intervention. In: Ferrell BR, Coyle N, Paice JA, eds. *Oxford Textbook of Palliative Nursing*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2015: 546-553.

Adapted from Peereboom, K, & Coyle, N. (2012). Facilitating goals-of-care discussions for patients with life-limiting disease: communication strategies for nurses. *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*, 14(4), 254.

CAPC COVID-19 Response Resources: • [www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/](http://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/)

Patient Provider Communication During COVID-19: [www.patientprovidercommunication.org/supporting-communication-covid-19.htm](http://www.patientprovidercommunication.org/supporting-communication-covid-19.htm)

COVID-Ready Communication Skills: A Playbook of VitalTalk Tips: [www.vitaltalk.org/guides/covid-19-communication-skills/](http://www.vitaltalk.org/guides/covid-19-communication-skills/)  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uSh0FeYdkGgHsZqem552iC0KmXlgaGKohl7SoeY2UXQ/edit#>