

SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION GUIDE

SUBSTITUTE DECISION MAKERS

A CONVERSATION TOOL FOR CLINICIANS

Adaptation for COVID-19



The purpose of this scripted guide is to discuss potential outcomes of possible COVID-19 infection with at risk adults and their Substitute Decision Makers prior to a health crisis, including the elderly, those with chronic conditions (eg. heart/lung/renal disease, diabetes) or immunocompromised patients (eg. cancer, HIV/AIDS, transplant recipients). The intention is to open up dialogue and to introduce possible limitations to critical care interventions - eg. they may not be a candidate for ventilation, or for transfer to hospital. It is not intended to be a conversation to convince patients/clients to change their MOST status. This guide is to learn more about patients.

CONVERSATION FLOW	GUIDED SCRIPT
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1. **Set up the conversation**

- Introduce purpose
- Prepare of future decisions
- Ask permission

"I'd like to talk with you about COVID-19 and what may be ahead for your _____ (eg. mother, brother, friend, etc.) and his/her care. I would also like to hear from you about what is important to your _____ so that we can make sure we provide him/her with the care he/she wants if he/she gets sick with COVID-19 - **is this okay?**"

Transition conversation to Step 2. Utilize paraphrasing and demonstrate empathy to let them know they've been heard.

2. **Assess COVID-19 understanding and preferences**

"What is your **understanding** about COVID-19 and how it is affecting at risk people?"
 "How much **information** would you like from me about COVID-19 and what is likely to be ahead if for your _____ (eg. mother, brother, friend, etc) if they get sick with it?"
 "How are you **coping** during this time of uncertainty?"

Transition conversation to Step 3. Utilize paraphrasing and demonstrate empathy to let them know they've been heard.

3. **Share prognosis**

- Share prognosis
- Caution: purpose is not to provide education
- Frame as a "wish...worry" "hope ... wonder" statement
- Allow silence, explore emotion

"I want to share with you our current **understanding** of COVID-19 and how it affects people at risk, specifically those like your _____ with _____ (specific health condition(s), eg. heart/lung/renal disease, cancer, diabetes, etc.).

COVID-19 is a virus that spreads through contact with liquid droplets when someone coughs or sneezes, often entering through our eyes, nose or throat if you are in close contact. We know that it is particularly serious for vulnerable people, especially for those who have other health problems. It can also cause other very severe problems.

It can be difficult to predict what will happen if your _____ gets sick with COVID-19. I **hope** it would not be severe and that he/she will continue to live well at _____ (current place of residence, eg. home, assisted living, long term care, etc.).

But I'm **worried** that as an adult with other health problems, your _____ could get sick quickly and that he/she is at risk of dying. I think it is important for us to prepare for that possibility."

Transition conversation to Step 4 by allowing for silence. Consider exploring emotion. Refer to SIC Clinicians Reference Guide for more scripted language on common difficult responses (eg. tears, anger, denial). April 06, 2020

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4. Explore key topics

- Meaning
- Fears and worries
- Sources of strength
- Family/People that matter
- Best care

"What would your _____ say is **most important** to him/her right now? What means the most to your _____, and gives his/her life meaning?"
 "What would your _____ say are his/her biggest **fears and worries** about the future and his/her health?"
 "What gives your _____ and you **strength** as you think about the future?"
 "How much do your _____'s **other family/people that matter to him/her** know about his/her priorities and wishes?"
 "Is there anything else that we need to know about your _____ so that we can give him/her the **best care possible**?"

Transition conversation to Step 5. Utilize paraphrasing and demonstrate empathy to let them know they've been heard.

5. Reassurance

"We want you to know that **our priority is to ensure that your _____ is cared for and comfortable** if he/she becomes sicker. Regardless of the medical treatments that he/she gets or does not get, his/her health care team will always provide treatments to help make him/her feel better. So it is important to let us know if your _____ gets a new cough, fever, shortness of breath or other signs that his/her health is changing. We will continue to support you and your _____ as best we can to get the right help for him/her."

Transition conversation to Step 6. Utilize paraphrasing and demonstrate empathy to let them know they've been heard.

6. Close the conversation

- Summarize what you've heard
- Make a recommendation within your scope of practice
- Check in with patient
- Affirm commitment

"I've heard you say that _____ is really important to your _____. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about COVID-19 and his/her current health, I **recommend*** that we...."

Refer to Serious Illness Clinician Reference Guide for additional help with recommendations (page 18)

Focus: Wellbeing	"Talk again in a few days, to reassess where your _____ is at."
Focus: Illness	"Talk with your _____'s primary care providers." "Make plans for care at home."
Focus: Support System	"Talk to your _____'s other family/those that matter to him/her."
Focus: Help	"Get you and other family/people that matter more information about risks and benefits regarding specific critical care treatments (eg. restarting their heart or using a breathing machine)."

7. Document your conversation on the ACP Record and fax if non-acute setting. Communicate with primary care providers. Store in Greensleeve if paper charts are used in your setting.

"How does this seem to you?"
 "I know this is a scary time for all of us. We will do everything we can to help you through this."

8. Communicate with key clinicians.