

# Conversation Starters in Palliative Approach to Care

For health-care providers

Before having a serious illness conversation educate yourself on the patient's illness, possible trajectory, and likely prognosis.

## Learn to manage emotions with empathy

Expect conversations to be emotional. Avoid pushing medical facts or information on emotions or resistance, and meet emotions by articulating empathy.

### 3 Ws (I wish- I worry-I wonder):

**I wish** that this was not the case. **I worry** your health is going to change quickly and **wonder** about preparing for that possibility.

**I wish** that treatment worked. Or **I wish** you were not in this situation.

**I worry** that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things might get worse, and that time may be as short as \_\_ (weeks/days).

**I wonder** if we can discuss how best we can meet your needs now.

### NURSE:

**Naming emotion:** It sounds like you are \_\_\_\_.

**Understanding:** Thanks for sharing. It helps me understand what you are thinking/feeling more.

**Respecting:** I can see you are following our recommendations.

**Support:** I will do everything I can to ensure you get what you need.

**Exploring:** Could you tell me more about what you mean when you said \_\_\_\_.

## Initiate dialogue

Ask for the patient's permission, identify who else they would like to include, and when and where would make them most comfortable.

*In my experience, most patients want me to discuss what might happen in the future with their illness. Others are not interested. Would this be a good time to discuss your illness? (When would be a good time to discuss your illness?)*

## Explore understanding of the illness

Use open-ended questions. There may be silence as the patient thinks, give them time and remain quiet until they respond.

*How much information about your health would you like from me?*

*What do you think about what's happening with your health right now?*

Then, reflect back on what the patient tells you to ensure you understand their perspective.

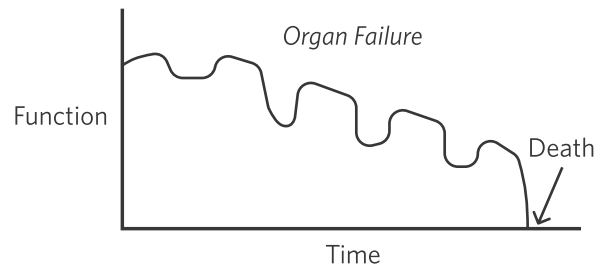
## Provide illness education

With the patient's permission, slowly and clearly explain the diagnosis and its life-limiting effects in plain language.

*This is my understanding of where things are at right now...*

Visuals help, especially trajectories.

### Proposed Trajectories of Dying



## Identify goals and values

Develop a deeper understanding of the patient beyond their medical conditions and social status.

*If your health gets worse, what's important to you?*

*When you think about the future, is there anything you worry about?*

*What gives you strength through the hard times?*

*What do I need to know about you to give you the best care possible?*

*What do I need to know about your culture to give you the best care possible?*

*If your health gets worse, how much are you willing to go through for the possibility of more time?*

## Create a plan with the patient

**Summarize** → **Recommend** → **Feedback** → **Affirm** → **Revisit**

*This is what I heard you say...*

*I suggest that we \_\_\_.*

*How does the plan seem to you?*

*As part of your health team, I will do all I can to help you get the best care possible.*

*If you think of anything else later, we can revisit this conversation another time.*