

# Pocket Tool for End-of-life Discussions



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# Serious Illness Conversation Guide

## Conversation Flow

### 1. Set up the conversation

- Introduce purpose
- Prepare for future decisions
- Ask permission

### 2. Assess understanding and preferences

### 3. Share prognosis

- Share prognosis
- Frame as a “wish...worry”, “hope...worry” statement
- Allow silence, explore emotion

### 4. Explore key topics

- Goals
- Fears and worries
- Sources of strength
- Critical abilities
- Tradeoffs
- Family

### 5. Close the conversation

- Summarize
- Make a recommendation
- Check in with patient
- Affirm commitment

### 6. Document your conversation

### 7. Communicate with key clinicians

# Patient-tested Language

**SETUP** "I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want — **is this okay?**"

**ASSESS** "What is **your understanding** now of where you are with your illness?"

"How much **information** would you like from me?"

"I want to share with you **my understanding** of where things are with your illness..."

**SHARE** *Uncertain:* "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I **hope** you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm worried that you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that possibility."

OR

*Function:* "I **hope** that this is not the case, but I'm **worried** that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."

"What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?"

**EXPLORE** "What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?"

"If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of gaining more time?"

"How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?"

**CLOSE** "I've heard you say that \_\_\_ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I **recommend** that we \_\_\_. This will help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you."

"I will do everything I can to help you through this."

## Resources

- **Fast Facts #360 – The Surprise Question:**  
Brief article reviewing an easy screening tool to help clinicians determine when to initiate Advanced Care planning and End of Life discussions.  
*[www.mypcnow.org/fast-fact/the-surprise-question-as-a-prognostic-tool/](http://www.mypcnow.org/fast-fact/the-surprise-question-as-a-prognostic-tool/)*
- **Vital Talk:**  
A wealth of resources for clinicians on all topics surrounding End of Life, including topic-specific video clips and scripts.  
*[www.vitaltalk.org/resources/](http://www.vitaltalk.org/resources/)*
- **The Conversation Project:**  
Simple guide to help people initiate conversations with their loved ones about preferences for End of Life.  
*[theconversationproject.org/starter-kits/#conversation-starter-kit](http://theconversationproject.org/starter-kits/#conversation-starter-kit)*
- **Prepare for Your Care:**  
Simple, clear patient-oriented guide for making plans for End of Life.  
*[www.prepareforyourcare.org](http://www.prepareforyourcare.org)*

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