

In anticipation of ongoing challenges throughout the pandemic, family physicians should be proactive in holding discussions with patients who have chronic disease. Creating a plan early on gives both you and the patient a sense of control and helps with management of both physical and mental health.

MANAGE PRESCRIPTION SUPPLIES

Review patients' medication and medical supplies to ensure adequate supply and advise on how to collect refills safely. Prescribe longer Rx if possible and safe. Many pharmacies are offering free delivery and dedicated shopping hours for people in need of special consideration.

www.drugsearch.ca allows you to search for the most affordable drug options.

PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

Discuss COVID-19, including how to identify significant symptoms, and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection. Make patients with chronic disease aware that the symptoms they experience may not reflect the severity of their illness. Remind patients that they should not hesitate to call their family doctor or emergency services when necessary.

Advise patients over the age of 75 that they may experience atypical symptoms, such as delirium, falls, generalized weakness, functional decline, dizziness, chest pain, gastrointestinal problems, and anosmia.

SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

Encourage patients to take control of their mental health and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Inform patients of techniques for relieving anxiety, such as box breathing, exercising, mindfulness techniques, or engaging in hobbies.

Encourage patients to develop preparedness plans in the event of further lockdown restrictions. At the same time, advise them to limit their intake of news and social media to essential information only.

Refer patients to resources to seek further help if necessary—see www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19

SUPPORT A SELF-ISOLATION PLAN

Remind your patients to have a plan for support in place in case they need to self-isolate either due to symptoms of COVID-19 or due to possible exposure to COVID-19. [Health Canada](#) has a helpful checklist of necessary supplies and things to consider.

PROACTIVELY SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS

Encourage patients to be proactive in managing their physical and mental health throughout the pandemic. Discuss how to continue regular appointments throughout the coming months, either virtually or in-person where safe and necessary. Consider the patient's preferences for communication. Schedule appointment dates and times.

During appointments, monitor the patient's physical and emotional functioning, as well as their capacity to sustain ongoing treatment.

DISCUSS GOALS OF CARE

Initiate a discussion around the patient's wishes should they become seriously ill. This should be an exploration of the patient's understanding of their health condition and how it might be affected by COVID-19 or other illnesses.

Elicit the patient's beliefs, values and goals around quality of life and the care they would like to receive in the event of worsening illness.

Acknowledge there may be decisions that patients receiving palliative care may want to consider within the context of the pandemic, such as whether to be admitted to a hospital if it means being separated from loved ones.

The Ontario Palliative Care Network provides a [guide to holding the goals of care discussion](#). Our [guide to serious illness conversations can be found here](#).

Encourage the patient to share their wishes with family, friends or other caregivers, or consider inviting them into the discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BCCFP COVID-19 Resources: www.bccfp.bc.ca/covid-19

Advance care planning guide for patients: www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2013/MyVoice-AdvanceCarePlanningGuide.pdf
www.fraserhealth.ca/acp

SOURCES

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/-/media/Project/FraserHealth/FraserHealth/Health-Professionals/Professionals-Resources/Advance-care-planning/Older-Adult-Seniors-Clinic-ACP-Workshop.pdf>