

CARE DURING COVID-19

Serious Illness Conversations with Patients at High Risk From COVID-19



Patients undergoing palliative care, or with comorbidities known to increase complications, who acquire a COVID-19 infection may require their goals of care to be rapidly reassessed. This involves holding a serious illness conversation (SIC).

The SIC should be a detailed exploration of the patient's understanding of their illness and their hopes, fears, goals, and values. Fraser Health recommend following the steps below. Before transitioning from one to step to the next, demonstrate empathy and repeat back key points to let the individual know they've been heard.

This resource is adapted from the Fraser Health Serious Illness Conversation Guide: www.fraserhealth.ca/-/media/Project/FraserHealth/FraserHealth/Health-Professionals/Clinical-resources/Advance-Care-Planning---Serious-Illness/Serious-Illness_Mini-Reference_COVID19-Guide.pdf

STEP 1: SET UP THE CONVERSATION

"I'd like to talk with you about this illness and what may be ahead for you. I would also like to hear from you about what is important to you so that we can make sure we provide you with the care that is best for you—is this okay?"

STEP 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 about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"

"How are you coping during this time of uncertainty?"

STEP 3: SHARE PROGNOSIS

Use "wish, worry, hope, wonder" statements and allow silences for thought and emotion.

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

"I wish we were not in this situation, but I'm worried that you could get much sicker very quickly. If that happens you are at risk of dying in a short period of time. I think it is important for us to prepare for that possibility."

STEP 4: UNDERSTAND THE PATIENT'S WISHES

"What is most important to you right now?"

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

"What gives you strength as you think about the future?"

"How much does your family/people that matter to you know about your wishes?"

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

Discuss wishes around quality of life during palliative care, such as whether they would want to be admitted to a hospital if it means being separated from loved ones.

STEP 5: REASSURE AND CLOSE

"I want you to know that my priority is to ensure that you are cared for and comfortable if you become sicker."

"I've heard you say that ____ is important to you. Keeping this in mind, and what we know about this illness, I recommend that ____."

"How does this plan seem to you?"

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Monitor any impact on your own mental health and seek care when needed. **Access the Physician Health Program 24-Hour Help Line at 1-800-663-6729.**

The BCCFP provides resources on physician wellness and resilience at www.bccfp.bc.ca/resiliency-and-wellness/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

CMA Framework for Ethical Decision Making During the Coronavirus Pandemic

www.pallium.ca/pallium-canadas-covid-19-response-resources/

www.speakupontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GOC-FECMo-COVIDNeg.pdf

SOURCES

<http://covid19.providencehealthcare.org/sites/covid19.providencehealthcare.org/files/Guide%20for%20SICs%20with%20Hospitalized%20high-risk%20COVID19%2B%20Patients%20v3.pdf>
www.fraserhealth.ca/-/media/Project/FraserHealth/FraserHealth/Health-Professionals/Clinical-resources/Advance-Care-Planning---Serious-Illness/Serious-Illness_Mini-Reference_COVID19-Guide.pdf
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