Serious Illness Conversation Guide

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 that okay?

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

How much information about what is likely ahead with your illness would you like from me?

ASSESS

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

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

Time: I wish we were not in this situation, but I’m worried that time may be as short as ___ (express as a range, e.g. days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year).

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.

SHARE PROGNOSIS

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

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

What gives you strength as you think about the future with your illness?

What abilities are so critical to your life that you can’t imagine living without them?

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

How much do your loved ones know about your priorities and wishes?

EXPLORE

I’ve heard you say ____. 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.

How does this plan seem to you? We will do everything we can to help you through this.

CLOSE

To colleague: “I talked with the patient about _____. I learned _____, I think they would benefit from talking with you about ______.”