Serious Illness Conversation Guide

CONVERSATION FLOW

1. Set up the conversation
   Introduce the idea and benefits
   Ask permission

2. Assess illness understanding and information preferences

3. Share prognosis
   Tailor information to patient preference
   Allow silence, explore emotion

4. Explore key topics
   Goals
   Fears and worries
   Sources of strength
   Critical abilities
   Tradeoffs
   Family

5. Close the conversation
   Summarize what you've heard
   Make a recommendation
   Affirm your commitment to the patient

6. Document your conversation

PATIENT-TESTED LANGUAGE

1. "I'm hoping we can talk about where things are with your illness and where they might be going — is this okay?"

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

3. "How much information about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"

4. "Prognosis: "I'm worried that time may be short." or "This may be as strong as you feel."

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. "It sounds like ________ is very important to you."

12. "Given your goals and priorities and what we know about your illness at this stage, I recommend..."

13. "We're in this together."