Communicating with the Seriously Ill and Dying Patient
Marilyn Graves, MSN, RN, CWOCN, CHPN®

Disclosures
Marilyn L. Graves has no real or perceived conflicts of interest that relate to this presentation.

Objectives
At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:
1. Describe the need to support communication with patients at end of life.
2. Identify ways to promote communication with patients at the end of life.
3. Discuss helpful statements to start conversation with patients at end of life care.
COMMUNICATING WITH THE SERIOUSLY ILL AND DYING PATIENT

Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA) Nursing Assistant Education

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

• Communicating with seriously ill patients can be one of the most challenging and difficult aspects of nursing care.

• Patients, their families, and caregivers often do not want to mention the possibility of dying and death, even in the face of great suffering.

BE PREPARED

• Patients’ history and current situation.
• Supportive environment.
• Allow time for conversation; the best time for conversations may be during care.
• Be culturally sensitive.

WHAT TO DO

• Maintain privacy.
• Speak loud enough for patients to hear you – do not shout.
• Listen with full attention. Limit disruptions or distractions including the use of cell phones and texting.
WHAT TO DO

• Acknowledge patient's emotions with caring and empathy.
• Give your patient time to ask questions and express thoughts.

WHAT TO DO

• Use proper body language, tone of voice, and manners to communicate respect and understanding.
• Sit face to face, making eye contact and speaking directly with patients and family members.

WHAT TO DO

• Ensure you are aware of patients' cultural practices.
• Ask the patient or family what would be the most comfortable and appropriate way of communicating.
• For example: Some cultures may find it offensive to talk directly to the patient, or to make eye contact.
HELPFUL STATEMENTS

• “Tell me more about,” or “how does this make you feel,” will give you clues to patients’ emotional states.

• Stating: “I hear your concern, your worry, or your frustration,” is a helpful way to acknowledge that you heard what patients say.

HELPFUL STATEMENTS

• “What have you heard the doctors and nurses say about your illness?” follow up with “Do you want to know more?”

• “How has this illness affected your life?”

• “What are you most concerned about at this time?”

HELPFUL STATEMENTS

• Offer supportive comments to your patients for controlling pain and other symptoms.

• Let patients and families know you will express their concerns to the nurse.

• Offer emotional support to them and their loved ones as you share this journey together.