

Conducting Effective Goals-of-Care Discussions

Productive goals-of-care discussions require skill, time, sensitivity, and compassion. An informed patient, armed with choices and an understanding of their current health status, feels in control.

Using an approach that empathizes, informs, and seeks to learn about the patient's healthcare goals often results in their willingness to work with you to develop their future care plan.

Conversation Starters

- How has your health changed over the last year?
- What are your most important goals for your healthcare?
- What gives you strength? What concerns you?
- What does a good day look like for you?
- How much information about the progression of your disease would you like to hear?

Confirm You Understand: Repeat Back Their Words

- “I hear you saying that what’s most important to you is...”
- “I understand that you want to make sure to avoid the following things...”

Expect and Acknowledge Emotions

- “I can see you’re very distressed about this. Is it okay with you if we talk a bit more about what this means?”
- “I can’t imagine what it’s been like to process this news.”
- “All of this information must be a lot to absorb...”

Also appreciate the value of strategic silence so the patient can process the conversation content and corresponding emotions.

SPIKES

Embrace a Patient-first Approach to
Your Goals-of-Care Discussions



S

Setting

Choose a private, comfortable, non-threatening setting



P

Perception

Uncover what the patient & family think is happening



I

Invitation

Ask the patient what they would like to know



K

Knowledge

Explain the disease and care options in plain language



E

Emotion

Respect feelings, and respond with empathy



S

Summarize

Recap and decide next steps

Source: Baile, W. F., Buckman, R., Lenzi, R., Glober, G., Beale, E. A., & Kudelka, A. P. (2000). SPIKES—a six-step protocol for delivering bad news: application to the patient with cancer. *The oncologist*, 5(4), 302-311.