Palliative Care: Effective Communication

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Objectives

Demonstrate effective communication skills in a way that is sensitive, honest, compassionate, and attentive when engaging terminally ill patients and their families; this includes communicating in the following situations:

- Discussing Bad News
- Request for Hasten Death
- Discussing Goals of Care for an incapacitated person
- Discussing Care with a Conflicting Family
Principles of Effective Communication

- Professional communication is a skill
- Communication is crucial in a therapeutic encounter, in order to establish therapeutic relationship
- All health care providers need to be interactive and respond to the patient’s needs
- Trust is the underlying component to effective communication

Ian Anderson, 2003
Healthcare Training

Traditional Training
- Healthcare training stresses diagnosis and treatment rather than communication.

Patient-Centered Training
- Need to stress listening and understanding patient experience.
- Gaining understanding can help guide healthcare diagnosis and treatments.
Therapeutic Communication

- Active listening
- Open-ended questions
- Reflective statements
- Clarification
- Summarization
- Validation
- Reassurance
- Transitions
- Being present
- Silence
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

- Assessment
- Information Sharing
- Decision-Making
- Care Planning
- Care Delivery
- Confirmation
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

Assessment

- History of active and potential issues, opportunities for growth, associated with expectations, needs, hopes and fears
- Examine with assessment scales (ESAS, PPS), physical examination, laboratory, radiology procedures, need for other consultants (spiritual care, palliative care, allied health)
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

Information Sharing
- Confidentiality limits
- Desire and readiness for information
- Process of sharing information
- Translation
- Reaction to information
- Understanding
- Desire for additional information
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

**Decision-Making**
- Capacity for consent (MMSE)
- Advance Care Directive/Planning
- Surrogate decision making
- Goals for care (Issue prioritization)
- Therapeutic treatment/comfort options with potential benefit, risks, burdens
- Request for; withholding, withdrawing, therapy with no potential benefit and hastened death
- Conflict resolution
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

Care Planning

- Setting of care
- Process to negotiate and develop plan of care that:
  - Addresses issues and opportunities, delivers chosen therapies
  - Includes for- dependents, backup coverage, respite care, emergencies, discharge planning, and bereavement care
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

- **Care Delivery**
  - Composition (family, extended network)
  - Leadership, coordination, facilitation
  - Education, training
  - Support (essential services)
- **Therapy delivery**
  - Process
  - Storage, handling, disposal
  - Infection control
Essential Steps During a Therapeutic Encounter

- Confirmation
  - Understanding
  - Satisfaction
  - Complexity
  - Stress
- Concerns, other issues, questions
- Ability to participate in plan of care
Phases of a Therapeutic Relationship

Three phases:

- Intake: Set the stage, Frame of Reference, Share a common language
- Ongoing care: Collect data and document with each therapeutic encounter
- Closure
Phase 1: Intake

- Patient/family characteristics/contacts
  - Cultural, personal, religious, values, beliefs and practices
  - Developmental state, disabilities
  - Adverse events, personality
- History of primary and secondary diseases
- Establish prognosis
- Eligibility criteria for program
- Establish patient/family preferences
Phase 11: Ongoing Care

- Review patient/family characteristics
- Review active issues
- Screen for new issues
- Address for adverse effects
- Assess plan of care and therapeutic protocols
Phase 111: Closure

- Review status of active issues
- Specify closure/transfer data
Goals of Communication at the End of Life

- Convey respect and understanding
- Convey information about illness, its likely course and treatment options
- Communicate empathy and support
- Convey appropriate “hope”
- Develop a treatment plan in context with patient’s goals, values and notions of quality of life
- Arrange for follow up meetings and reassure about ongoing care and support

» Anderson, 2003
Hot Communication Topics

- Discussing Bad News
- Request for a Hasten Death
- Discussing Goals of Care for an Incapacitated Person
- Discussing Care with Conflicting a Family