

COVID Ready Communication Playbook Summary

These are unprecedented times. There's no roadmap. We're facing conversations that we never expected—or wanted—to have.

PATIENT COMMUNICATION STEPS:

Get Ready – Info, People, Place

WHAT YOU COULD SAY:

“Let me take a minute to make sure I’ve got what I need.”

Understand what the patient knows

“What have you taken away from other doctors so far?”

Inform starting with a headline

“From the information I have now and from my exam, your situation is serious enough that you should be in the hospital. We will know more in the next day, and we will update you.”

Demonstrate empathy, respond directly to emotion

“This is such a tough situation. I think anyone would be scared. Could you share more with me?”

Equip the patient for the next step

“I want you to be prepared for the next step. Can I explain...”

Proactive Planning: Common Questions and Responses

WHAT THEY SAY:

WHAT YOU COULD SAY:

“I want everything possible. I want to live.”

“We are doing everything we can. This is a tough situation. Could we step back for a moment so I can learn more about you? What do I need to know about you to do a better job taking care of you?”

“I don’t think my spouse would have wanted this.”

“Well, let’s pause and talk about what they would have wanted. Can you tell me what they considered most important in their life? What meant the most to them, gave their life meaning?”

“I don’t want to end up being a vegetable or on a machine.”

“Thank you, it is very important for me to know that. Can you say more about what you mean?”

If you need to proactively plan for the patient's preferences and goals, think: **"CALMER"**

C Check in

Take their emotional temperature

“How are you doing with all this?”

A Ask about COVID

Just Listen

“What have you been thinking about COVID and your situation?”

L Lay out issues

Prepare for possible circumstances

“Here is something I want us to be prepared for.”

M Motivate them to choose a proxy

Talk about what matters. Make a recommendation—if they would be able to hear it.

“Who helps us make decisions if you can’t speak?”

E Expect emotion

Watch for and acknowledge at any point

“If things took a turn for the worse, what you say now can help your family / loved ones?”

R Record the discussion

Any documentation – even brief – will help your colleagues and your patient

“This can be hard to think about.”

“I’ll write what you said in the chart. It’s really helpful, thank you.”

Saying Goodbye: Common Questions and Responses

WHAT THEY SAY:

“Do I need to say my goodbye?”

“How can you not let me in for a visit?”

“Yes, I’m his daughter.”

WHAT YOU COULD SAY:

“I’m hoping that’s not the case. And I worry time could indeed be short. What is most pressing on your mind?”

“The risk of spreading the virus is so high that I am sorry to say we cannot allow visitors. We can help you be in contact electronically. **I wish I could let you visit, because I know it’s important. Sadly, it is not possible now.**”

“I have something serious to talk about with you. Are you in a place where you can talk?”

If you need to arrange a goodbye phone/video call, think: **"LOVE"**

L Lead The Way Forward

“I am [Name], one of the [professionals] on the team.”

“For most people, this is a tough situation.”

“I’m here to walk you through it if you’d like.”

O Offer The Four Things That Matter To Most People

“So we have the opportunity to make this time special.”

“Here are five things you might want to say. Only use the ones that ring true for you: 1. Please forgive me, 2. I forgive you, 3. Thank you, 4. I love you, 5. Goodbye. Do any of those sound good?”

V Validate What They Want To Say

“I think that is a beautiful thing to say.”

“If my [daughter] were saying that to me, I would feel so valued and so touched.”

“I think he/she can hear you even if they can’t say anything back”

“Go ahead, just say one thing at a time. Take your time.”

E Expect emotion

“I can see that he/she meant a lot to you.”

“Can you stay on the line a minute? I just want to check on how you’re doing”