

Due to COVID-19, Advance Care Planning is Imperative: We All Need to Pitch In

Regardless of healthcare profession, please address basic ACP during phone, video, or in person visits. Any ACP done now may save patients, families, and other providers from uncertainty and stress later on.

What You Can Say:

STEP 1: Ask About a Surrogate Decision Maker

“I wanted to take a moment to talk to you about advance care planning. This involves choosing an emergency contact and the medical care that is important to you.”

“First, I would like to ask if there is someone you trust to help make medical decisions for you if there ever came a time you could not speak for yourself?”

If yes: “That’s great. If not already, now is a good time to reach out and tell them that you chose them for this role and what is important to you. That way they can be the best advocate and speak up for you if needed.”

“I will make sure I put this in your medical record. It is also important to keep their name and phone number on hand, both on your phone and also written down in your purse or wallet.”

If no: “It is OK if you cannot think of someone right now. If someone comes to mind in the future, please let your medical providers know so we can put the information in your medical record.”

STEP 2: Ask about Advance Directives

“Have you ever completed an advance directive? This is a legal form that lets you write down the name of your medical decision maker and your wishes for medical care.” What about a POLST form?

If yes: “That’s great. Do you remember what you wrote down? Do you still feel the same way? Do you know where this form is?”

“The most important part is to now share the information in this form with your family and friends. It is also important to bring a copy of the form with you if you need to come to the clinic or hospital. That way your family, friends, and medical providers will know what is most important to you.”

If no: “This is OK. *[Example, use local preference]* A good place to start is a website called PREPAREforYourCare.org. It has simple information and advance directive forms for free and COVID-19 specific information and resources. You can get the website on a smartphone, a tablet, or a computer. You can even do this with your family and friends. That website again is PREPAREforYourCare.org. You can download the form to fill out on your computer or print to out.”

[Optional due to social distancing]: “The forms sometimes need extra witnessing or a notary to be legal. While we are practicing social distancing, if you fill out the form it is OK for now to just sign and date it. And, it is really important to share the information with your family and friends and medical providers. These conversations are the most important part. Bring a copy of the form with you if you need to come to the clinic or hospital.”]

STEP 3: Document Patients’ Wishes in the Medical Record

Learn and use your hospital’s standard documenting practices that allow for the information to be in a **central location** so that other medical providers can find it when needed.

If You have More Time

Step 2a: Additional ACP Communication: *Focus values, not a menu/checkbox approach.*

“What is most important in your life and what brings you joy. Is it family, friends, pets or hobbies?”

Ask about their own experiences to help shape their values.

“Have you ever had your own experience with serious illness or a friend or family member who was very sick or dying? [Optional] Do you remember seeing someone on TV who was very sick or dying?”

When you think back, what do you think went well and what did not go well?
If you were in these situations [again], what would you want for yourself?”

Normalize the spectrum of peoples' preferences.

“It can sometimes be helpful to think in general about what kind of medical care would be important to you. For example, some people feel that living as long as possible is the most important thing to them, no matter what their quality of life may be or the pain they may go through. Other people feel that there may be some health situations they know they would not want to go through, such as not being able to wake up from a coma or needing to be on machines to live. Have you thought about this before? What type of person are you?”

[Optional: People may feel very different about this now in their current health and in the future if they were to get very sick, such as if they were to get Coronavirus. Have you thought about this?"]

“It is very important that you share this with your family, friends, and medical providers. If you have to come to the clinic or hospital you may be asked these questions again.”

For COVID-specific communication see these resources:

- [CAPC](#)
- [Vital Talk](#)
- [Respecting Choices](#)
- [Ariadne Labs](#)