

Talking about Code Status

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PERSPECTIVES

- Think of talking about code status with families as a **procedure** with indications, contraindications, and even complications.
- > 70% of older adults consider quality of life more important than life extension.
- > 60% of older adults think that inability to get out of bed or requiring a breathing machine is worse than dying.
- Stepwise approach:
 - Ask permission to share bad news.
 - Explain the bad news clearly.
 - Verbiage like “I am worried that your relative might not survive” can be helpful.
 - Expect a medical question but respond with something like “I cannot imagine how scared this must make you feel”.
 - Ask about baseline function
 - “What kind of activities was your mother doing day to day before this started?”
 - Ask what quality of life the patient would find worth living for
 - Consider the question “would your mother be ok if she was to become ventilator dependent”
 - Summarize back to the family member.
 - Give your recommendations.

ED Code Status Conversation Guide

Goal: Make patient-centered recommendations regarding intubation for patients who may be at high-risk for poor outcomes. After establishing that advance directive does not exist, complete the following steps:

Steps	What To Say
Break bad news	<p>Permission: I am afraid I have serious news. Would it be OK if I share?</p> <p>Disclose: Your [mother] is having a very difficult time breathing due to a [severe pneumonia]. With her serious health issues, I am worried that things may not go well, and it's possible [she] could even die.</p>
Align	We need to work together quickly to make the best decisions for [her] care.
Baseline function	<p>To decide which treatments might help [her] the most, I need to know more about [her]:</p> <p>What type of activities was [she] doing day to day before this illness?</p>
Values <i>Use question(s) as appropriate</i>	<p>Has [she] expressed wishes about the type of medical care [she] would or wouldn't want?</p> <p>How might [she] feel if treatments today led to: Inability to return to [her] favorite activities? Inability to care for [herself] as much as [she] does?</p> <p>What abilities are so crucial that [she] wouldn't consider life worth living if [she] lost them?</p> <p>How much more would [she] be willing to go through for possibility of more time?</p> <p>Are there states [she] would consider worse than dying?</p>
Summarize	What I heard is that your [mother] considered ____ most important, and that [she] would consider treatments that result in ____ unacceptable. Did I get that right?
Recommendation	<p>Based on what you've shared with me, we would recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive treatment focused on comfort; <u>or</u> • Intensive treatment focus on recovering from illness <p>We will use all available medical treatments that we think will help [her] recover from this illness. For [her], this means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting [her] body in recovering from this illness without treatments that could make [her] more uncomfortable, while do everything we can to assure that [she] is comfortable and peaceful; <u>or</u> • Supporting [her] body in recovering from this illness with all the intensive treatments we have, including ventilators, and so on, while also doing everything we can to assure that [she] is as comfortable as possible. I worry that even with maximum care, [her] body may still tire out. The admitting teams will support you over the coming days with upcoming decisions.

References

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