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The Ask-Tell-Ask Approach to Conversations with Seriously Ill Patients*
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ASK

- **Build trust first**
 - "I would like to be able to respect your wishes for future medical care. Would it be ok for us to talk about what you would want?"
 - "How are you doing compared to a year ago?"
 - **Assess patient/family understanding of the patient's medical condition and prognosis**
 - What have other physicians told you about your (the patient's) condition?
 - "What is your understanding of your (the patient's) major medical problem?"
 - "How serious is it?"
- **Determine patient's goals for treatment in their present condition?**
 - "What is most important to you in receiving treatment for your illness? What do you hope for?"
 - "What would you want to avoid in receiving treatment for illness (for example, some say being placed on a breathing machine or sent to a nursing home)? What do you fear?"
 - For a patient who lacks capacity, "If your _____(mother, father, etc) could wake up for a minute and see what condition he is in, what would he tell us to do? Are there things he would want to avoid in his treatment (for example, breathing machine or nursing home)?"

- **Explore understanding of who the patient wants to be their medical power of attorney representative and what the role of the MPOA representative/surrogate is**
 - "Who would you want to make medical decisions for you if you became too sick to make them yourself?"
To the family or friend the patient chooses to serve as legal agent: "What do you understand about your role as the medical power of attorney representative/surrogate? On what basis are you to make decisions?"

TELL

- **Explain the patient's overall condition emphasizing the patient's most serious comorbidities**
- **Discuss likely future complications**
- **Assist with informed decision about breathing machine, ICU, and CPR**
 - "Have you been on a breathing machine before? If you got sick, would you want to be on one again if necessary to keep you alive? To legal agent, "Has the patient been on a breathing machine before? Has he/she said anything about wanting/not wanting to be on a breathing machine?"
 - "It is helpful to learn what is most important to you. Would you want—to live as long as possible regardless of pain and suffering or to live a shorter period of time to avoid pain and suffering? (75% of patients want to live a shorter time to avoid pain and suffering)
 - CPR is not as successful as most people think. Would you want those treating you to attempt CPR if your heart stopped? If you live through CPR, you will be on a breathing machine. Is that what you would want?"

ASK

- **What questions do you have?**
- **In your own words, please tell me what you understand from our conversation.**
- **What will you tell your family about what we discussed?**

*Bernacki RE, et al. Communication About Serious Illness Care Goals: A Review and Synthesis of Best Practices. *JAMA Intern Med* 2014;174(12):1994-2003.