

# Care for the dying in the ICU

## Practical aspects and the goals of the end of life family meeting

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# Educational Objectives RE: EOL Family Meeting

1. **Objective 1:** Identify the key issues relating to leading a family meeting to discuss end of life care
2. **Objective 2:** Demonstrate the key behaviors (do's and don'ts) for leading a family meeting to discuss end of life care
3. **Objective 3:** Develop a system for the practicalities of the delivery of a high-quality family meeting to discuss end of life care



# This Pandemic may mean that...

Family discussions will be led by individuals who do not lead this type of meeting or communicated about such issues regularly



# OBJECTIVE 1



# Objective 1: Identifying the Key Issues

Knowledge and preparation are key!

Take steps to assure you know your **patient's goals and values**, as well as his/her **family's values and dynamics**

Decision making is a team activity!

Take your team into the meeting to demonstrate to the family the entire team wishes to share its expertise with them, while also learning from the family – **co-construction is key!**

Show you care!

Show your empathy and caring to **emphasize your alignment with family needs**



# OBJECTIVE 2



# Objective 2: “How to’s” of Communication

Leader’s Communication – Take your time and recognize the impacts of emotion on these processes

- Introduce yourself and the team fully and clearly, taking all time needed to do so
- Allow pauses in conversation, sometimes long ones, as it takes time to process information in heightened emotional states
  - Similarly, prepare to repeat yourself and explain facts in different ways
- Speak plainly and get to point (families often know what is coming)



# Objective 2: “How to’s” of Communication

## Collective Communication – Meaningful inclusion of all voices

- All team members should be offered space to speak, aimed at producing a comprehensive understanding
- Meaningfully invite and include all family members in the decision making – respectfully ask silent members for input
- Recap and summarise clearly, and ensure everyone agrees on the synthesized decisions





# Objective 2: How to Explain EOL Care

## Communication about EOL care – Clarity and Compassion

- Be very clear what EOL care entails (palliation of symptoms, fluids, nutrition etc)
- Remind the family that all usual comfort care will be given
- Discuss with them which aspects of medical care will not be delivered (i.e. CPR)



# Objective 2: What comes next in EOL care?

## Communication about EOL care – Respect and Continuity

- Ascertain what the family thinks is important at that stage of life (e.g., religious and cultural practices)
- Remind the family that the team will be available and will check in regularly, to ensure they feel highly involved in the ongoing care
- Write high quality EOL orders / care plans with bedside nurse
  - Decide whether and when to engage palliative care



# Objective 2: Potential Challenges

## Behaviours Associated with Difficult Meetings

- Feeling pressured to speak; think about how to be comfortable with pause
- Saying “withdrawal of care” – we never do that!
- Thinking all will be understood the first time. Be prepared to repeat key points and messages
- Using euphemisms to describe death (i.e. to pass, leave us)
- Making the family feel the decision is theirs alone- it isn't and shouldn't be!



# OBJECTIVE 3



# Objective 3: Practicalities of Running the Meeting

## Preparation

- Know your patient: including name and background, and check for further details from chart and team members
- Form and brief your team: Ensure everyone knows who is coming into the room (and why they are key)
- Choose an appropriate location: A quiet location where you won't be disturbed



# Objective 3: Practicalities of Running the Meeting

## Team Briefing

- What are the teams aims and objectives?
- What do we know about the family's values and dynamics?
- What do we know about the patient's values?
  - Has their condition changed since the meeting was planned?
- Does any change effect your discussions?



# Objective 3: Practicalities of Running the Meeting

## Recommended Steps for the Meeting

- (Re-)Introduce the entire team to the family
- Summarize where we are and what was previously discussed / agreed
- Directly state where we are now and why this happened
- Families often know you are about to discuss bad news so don't prolong their agony with a long-winded lead in.
- (Re-)Discuss the patient's values



# Objective 3: Practicalities of Running the Meeting

## Bringing it Together and Concluding the Meeting

- Clearly state the options for ongoing management informed by the patient's values and the standard of care
- Ensure the family has provided all input and feedback
- Form conclusions that are clear and agreed whenever possible
- Recap and arrange to meet again, as required





# One Page Summary



**Preparation is key:** know your team, your patient, and their family

**Team work is vital:** the family is as much a part of your team as all of your colleagues

**Show inclusivity, empathy and communicate with clarity**

**Split meeting into stages** to allow effective and compassionate delivery



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