

Timing of discussion

Recommendation

- All patients with advanced progressive life-limiting illnesses should be given the opportunity to discuss prognosis (including life expectancy, how the illness may progress, future symptoms and effect on function) and end-of-life issues.
- Do not assume that the patient does not want to discuss the topic simply because he or she does not raise the issue or because of cultural background.
- Give the patient the option not to discuss it or defer the discussion to a later time.
- Consider raising/introducing the topic in the following circumstances:
 - With all patients and their caregivers once it is clear that the patient has a life-limiting advanced progressive illness; or if the doctor would not be surprised if the patient died within 6–12 months
 - When there is a change in condition, or a perception (by patients, caregivers or clinical staff) of change
 - When a treatment decision needs to be made
 - If there are requests or expectations that are inconsistent with clinical judgement
 - If disease-specific treatment is not working or there are complications from this treatment that limit its effectiveness
 - At the time of referring the patient to specialist palliative care services.