

The Family Conference

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The Family Conference is a meeting in which healthcare professionals have the chance to meet with you and your family together to discuss information about the patient's illness, the response to treatment, and what to expect. This meeting fosters communication, evaluation of goals for care, and setting a plan of care that addresses your goals. It is an opportunity for you to share your concerns, ask questions, and provide information to help provide individualized care.

Goals for the Family Conference

- ✓ Get to know the person who is experiencing the illness and to understand his/her goals.
- ✓ Promote communication between the healthcare team and family/friends.
- ✓ Decrease stress and suffering by reviewing realistic goals for care and creating a realistic plan that is in alignment with those goals.
- ✓ Establish trust and support that will serve families throughout the course of a prolonged or complicated illness.

Who Participates in a Family Conference?

- ✓ The patient, family and friends, and physicians and other members of the healthcare team should participate.
- ✓ Only those people who are actively involved in the care of your loved one and have information to contribute should participate.
- ✓ We welcome the presence of your loved one's own spiritual care provider.
- ✓ Sometimes, the patient may seem too ill to participate much in the family conference, but even if it is limited, participation is important and encouraged.

It is important to take a few moments at the beginning of the Family Conference to introduce everyone.

How You Can Prepare for Participation in a Family Conference

- ✓ Consider your understanding of the patient's illness and progress.
- ✓ Expect the physician to review:
 - The patient's illness, response to treatment, and realistic chance of recovery.
 - How the plan of care meets the goals for care.
 - Therapies and treatment options.
- ✓ If you find that you are unclear about what the physician(s) and members of the healthcare team say, simply ask for clarification, as often as necessary.
- ✓ Plan to ask questions; there are no "dumb" questions.
- ✓ It is common to forget your questions; consider writing out your thoughts and questions beforehand.
- ✓ Plan to take notes. Often there is difficulty remembering what was said and how questions are answered.
- ✓ Plan to share aspects of what you know about the patient that will help the healthcare team to know and understand him/her.
- ✓ If you would like to tape the family conference or have a family member conference in by phone, please let the facilitator know ahead of time if possible.

The family conference ends with a summary of the discussion and the decisions and a plan for the next meeting. Communication is essential, especially during a long illness. The family conference will help assure meaningful, mutually beneficial communication.

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