

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Primary Care Training Workshop

Useful words and phrases

Here are some words and phrases suggested by colleagues that you may find useful.

Keeping silent but attentive may be best of all.

Reflective questions, i.e. repeating a word or phrase the patient has said as a question and clarifying questions can be very useful.

- 'Can you explain what you mean by that?'
- 'Why do you ask that question? Or 'What makes you ask that question?'
- 'What did they/the hospital/the specialist tell you – what did you understand from that?'
- 'What do you think is going on?'
- 'Are you the sort of person who likes to know all the details?'
- 'It is less good/more complicated than we thought/hoped' (*'warning shot'*)
- 'That must be difficult/hard for you.'/'I can imagine that this must be a very difficult time for you'
- 'I can see that is really difficult/frightening/upsetting' (*in response to verbal or non-verbal cues*)
- 'The disease has reached a point where cure is unlikely/not possible, but we will do all we can to help you achieve what is important to you.'
- 'What are the things that make life worth living for you?'
- 'What is most important to you now?'
- 'What do you think might help you now?'
- 'What would you like us to do?' 'What would be most helpful?'
- 'Are you frightened?'
- 'Are there particular things you worry about/fear?'
- 'What you told your family/friends/carers about your illness?'
- 'Can we arrange a meeting when there is more time for you to talk and one of your family can be present?'
- 'Some people at this stage of the illness are worried/concerned about the future/ what the future might hold/how things are going to progress (*but careful with 'progress' - in some cultures that means improve!*), is that the case with you?'
- 'Some people find talking about the future/getting worse very difficult.'

In response to the 'how long?' question:

- 'Have you had any thoughts yourself ...' or 'I see you have discussed your recent scan with the colleagues in the hospital. Was there any discussion about the future at the time?'
- 'For most people at this stage of the disease we'd be looking at weeks/months/years – but everyone is different, so it is hard to predict.'
- 'Do you want to know when the outlook changes?'

NB: It can be helpful to explain that average survival figures are only of limited relevance to an individual, and how even the most qualified and experienced doctor will regularly get the prognosis very wrong.

- 'I am happy to talk as much as you want today but will make time for you each time we meet to ask me anything you want to.'
- 'Would you like to bring someone with you (*spouse/family/friend – don't assume who they'd prefer*) when we meet next?'
- 'Would you like me to talk to your family/anyone else about this.'
- 'Shall we arrange to meet again?'

Phrases to avoid – they could give a signal that you don't want to have this conversation.

- 'Don't worry'
- 'You must stay positive'
- 'There is no need to worry about that now'
- 'Let's just see how it goes'
- 'It's not that bad'
- 'I know what you are feeling/going through'