

# Words **matter**

## Skills to support conversations in palliative care

### Your role is to:

- **Recognise** when a conversation is needed or desired by the patient or family
- **Be** ready to listen and then document what has been said
- **If** further conversations are needed, find someone who feels able to support that

### In the conversations you have, use:

- **Open** questions 'How are you today?' not 'Are you ok today?'
- **Pick** up on cues 'I am not so well today'.... 'Can you tell me why you say that?'
- **Reflect** back 'It sounds like so much has happened to you recently'
- **Focus** on their emotion 'I wonder how you are feeling, you seem worried'

### Understand what is important to the patient/family by asking:

- **'What** matters to you?'
- **'What** worries you the most?'

### Show empathy

- **Recognise** that for them 'Living with uncertainty is difficult'

### Consider having conversations about 'Planning Ahead' (Advance Care Planning)

- **'Some** people like to make their wishes known and to make plans for the future'
- **'Some** people find it helpful to hope for the best whilst preparing for the worst'

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## Skills to support conversations when someone is dying

Remember it is not the conversation that is distressing, it is the situation

- **Be honest:** adopt the 'D' dying word - 'I am worried that he/she is sick enough to die'
- **Kindness** helps a patient feel cared for and will be remembered by the family

## Make connections with the patient and family - understand the person behind the patient

- **What** did they do in their life? What did they enjoy? Who is in their family? Have they got photos?

## Answer questions

- **Reflect** back to understand what lies behind the question 'Am I dying?' 'Can you tell me why you ask that?' 'Do you feel that is happening to you?'
- **Be honest:** it is ok to say that you don't know, when asked, how long someone has left to live.  
'I am sorry that I don't know how long they have to live, if their condition changes we will inform you'

## Communication skills

- **Observe** how others communicate well - use their words, make them your own
- **Practice** using phrases - you will feel more comfortable with them over time.
- **Talk** to your colleagues - share the conversations you have had