

Preparing patients for serious illness conversations

SmartPhrase: SICPREP

Today we discussed arranging a follow up visit to further discuss your illness and your goals and values, to help us provide you with the care that is best for you. It's important for everyone to think about these difficult topics ahead of time, so that you can receive the care you want throughout your illness and at the end of life.

Discussing these topics can be difficult, and many people find it helpful to bring someone who is a source of support. In addition, if you have a healthcare agent or proxy, it may be helpful for them to participate in the discussion and learn more about your goals and values for your healthcare.

At this next visit, we will explore multiple important topics related to your goals and your future healthcare. I like to provide my patients with some questions in advance, so that you may think about your responses and be prepared for our discussion. These are some questions I may ask:

- What is your **understanding** of where you are with your illness?
- How much information would you want me to share about what is likely to be ahead with your illness?
- What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?
- What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?
- What gives you **strength** as you think about the future with your illness?
- What **abilities** are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?
- If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of more time?
- How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?

If you do not yet have an advance directive, or you want to make changes to this document, you can ask for a copy at the office. Also, you can find advance directives and other forms online at the Vermont Ethics Network at www.vtethicsnetwork.org. You can fill it out ahead of time and bring it to your next appointment, or we can work on it together at that time. Remember that in the state of Vermont, your next of kin is not automatically able to make decisions on your behalf. You must identify an individual as a healthcare agent or proxy on one of these forms.

If you have any other questions in advance of our meeting, you can contact our office. Other helpful resources for thinking about these conversations can be found at www.starttheconversationvt.org.