

# Why should you talk to your patients about advance care planning?

- You have a longstanding relationship with your patients and they trust you. This allows you to initiate the discussion and help educate them about the importance of advance care planning.
- You have knowledge and expertise about their illness.
- Research shows us that advance care planning:
  - Improves quality of life and quality of end-of-life care.
  - Reduces stress and anxiety for patients, families and caregivers.
  - Improves communication between patients, families and the health care team.
  - Reduces strain on the health care system.



Advance Care Planning is a process of reflection and communication. It is a time for patients to reflect on their values and wishes, and to let others know what kind of health and personal care they would want in the future if they became incapable of consenting to or refusing treatment or other care. It involves having discussions with family and friends – especially their Substitute Decision Maker(s) – who is the person or people who will provide consent or refusal of consent for care and treatment if the patient is incapable.

## Practical Suggestions

- Introduce the topic of advance care planning to all patients over 50 years of age. Also to all patients with end stage organ disease and cancer.
- Use the scripts below to start the conversation.
- You may want to make a second appointment to discuss this in more detail. Ask your patient to bring their Substitute Decision Maker to that appointment. Allow time for reflection and decision-making.
- Refer patients to the Speak Up: Advance Care Planning Workbook to help them explore their values and wishes.  
[www.advancereplanning.ca](http://www.advancereplanning.ca)
- Utilize the template “Thinking about my wishes for future health care”. Make sure the patient and their Substitute Decision Maker have copies. And that there is one in their chart.
- Make this a practice wide initiative by involving other healthcare professionals and practice staff.

Here are some suggested phrases for introducing the topic to your patients.



- You are well now, but it is good to plan for the future. What if you suddenly became ill or had an accident – and couldn't speak for yourself?
- The best time to think about advance care planning is when you are well and are able to make decisions in a calm state of mind.
- If you were to get very sick and could not speak for yourself, who would you trust to make medical decisions for you?
- I'd like to talk to you about your wishes for care in case you get very sick. That might not happen, but if it does and you can't communicate, it would be important to know who would speak for you and about your wishes for care.
- Advance care planning is similar to writing your will. It is good to be prepared and let your wishes be known.
- I want to give you the best care possible. Talking about your wishes will help me do that.

