

In times of crisis, it is valuable to take a moment to reflect on self-care and communication techniques that may help to manage the many demands and emotions experienced during the crisis. During this time, feelings of isolation, lack of control, disruption in identity and routine, and feelings of grief and uncertainty are very common among our staff, patients, families, and the wider community. We recognize that you may also be worried about your own health and that of your families. Especially during these increasingly stressful times, your coordinated effort and relentless commitment is noticed, valued, and appreciated. Your Beaumont community is grateful you are here. This is a resource to support patient and family communication and staff well-being as we move through these uncertain times together.

#### Communication Skills in Action

- Share the “bad news” including “why.”
- Apologize for their suffering.
- Acknowledge the emotion.
- Remind them “why” we are taking this action – “the facts.”
- Provide options and alternatives.
- Reassure them that their loved one is being well-cared for.
- Thank them for their understanding.

**Establish a strategy for support.** When telling a family member that they cannot be present with their loved one or delivering other bad news, it is important to have a plan for available options and resources. *Talking about what you can do and not only about what you can’t do* may help to alleviate feelings of helplessness. Families may be worried their loved one will not receive appropriate medical care if they are not there to advocate for them.

**Assess Understanding:** Determine the amount of information known regarding the concern or how much information is desired by asking open ended questions. Validate the person’s emotions and experiences and set the stage to allow the patient and family to emotionally brace for the news or information: “Unfortunately, I have some bad news to tell you” or “I am sorry to tell you...”.

**Reflective Listening.** Give your full attention by sitting down, making direct eye contact, encouraging conversation, and giving an occasional nod or smile to show understanding of what a person says and what a person feels. Be aware of your nonverbal actions including facial expressions and body posturing. Relay the information you heard back in a reflective or summarizing statement to ensure you understand and respect the other person's point of view.

**Empathize:** Exploring and validating emotions will work to establish a sense of trust and togetherness to facilitate coping for all. Patients and families may have emotional responses that vary from silence to anger, confusion, or crying. Be aware that times of stress are particularly challenging for those with pre-existing mental health issues. Recognize severe distress, respond with empathy, acknowledge feelings of frustration, and refer to appropriate services and resources for team-based support.

**Practice maintaining your calm.** Increasing your awareness of your breathing and shifting to more abdominal breathing will help to reduce stress and tension. Finding balance with adequate sleep, nutritious food, walks, journaling and meditation. An attitude of curiosity, being aware of your emotions, and remaining nonjudgmental allows for reflection and more clarity in problem solving.

**Communicate your needs.** Taking time for team huddles, rounding, and individual check-ins allow for the opportunity to not only share your feelings but also the ability to offer higher quality, wholistic care. Defining your boundaries and being aware of your triggers can prevent with getting drawn into a conflict. Simply stating your feelings helps others understand your point-of-view and can improve collaboration among the group.

**Table: Establishing a Strategy for Support**

- Suggest a family member bring any important patient items to the main entrance, in a bag clearly marked with the patient's name and room number. Encourage them to choose wisely as the fewer items brought in means the fewer germs go back home.
- Ask family members if there is anything important they want to share about the patient to help improve care plans.
- Create a plan for when patients and families may call for updates or when they will be contacted by a staff member.
- Encourage connection with the patient through their room phone or personal devices, with texting, video calls such as Facetime, Skype, or Facebook messenger.
- Consider utilizing telephonic family meetings, including the appropriate family member during bedside shift report, and rounding. Please be flexible with requests to use personal audio and video devices to bring families who are not allowed to visit into conversations such as medical updates, shared decision making, and discharge planning.

Example Scenarios	Response
<b>"What do you mean, I can't visit my Dad? He needs to see me, he will be very upset if he doesn't, I help him move around and brush his teeth and there are items he needs me to bring him. He isn't sick with the virus. I am not sick. Why can't you just test us and let me in?"</b>	<p>I understand that you are worried about your Dad and I am very sorry we are needing to keep you from being with him. Unfortunately, we are living through a very difficult time where we need to make difficult decisions for everyone's safety, including restricting visitation. Please be reassured that he is being well-cared for. While, I would like to say that we can test you and your Dad, the fact is that there is a shortage of tests throughout the nation at this time. Therefore, we are limiting our testing for the those who are actively showing symptoms and are in a high-risk group. During these visitation restrictions, here is what we can do to ensure that you remain connected with your Dad while he is here with us. (Refer to Table above.)</p> <p>I know that this is very difficult for you and your Dad. I wish it was different. Thank you for your understanding and partnership while we do everything possible to stop the spread of this infection.</p>
<b>"Don't tell me I can't see my wife. I'm going to move her out of here if I can't stay with her. Call her doctor now. I don't need to take this."</b>	<p>I am hearing you are angry with the visitation restrictions. I am very sorry that you are being separated from each other while we try to contain the spread of COVID-19. We certainly don't want you to remove her from our care, and we can assure you that she will be well-cared for. Are there specific concerns you would like me to discuss with your wife's doctor or nurse? I am happy to call them and let them know that you would like to talk. In the meantime, let's talk about what we can do to keep you connected with your wife. (Refer to Table above.)</p> <p>I know that this is very difficult for you and your wife. I wish it was different. Thank you for your understanding and partnership while we do everything possible to stop the spread of this infection.</p>
<b>"My sister doesn't speak English. She doesn't understand what the nurses are saying. I need to be there to calm her down and help her describe her needs. Please let me see her."</b>	<p>I understand that you are worried that your sister will not be able to communicate her needs and that she will not receive the proper care. I am very sorry that we need to restrict your presence while we try to contain the spread of COVID-19. Tell me more about your sister and what worries you most. Beaumont provides free language services to people whose primary language is not English, such as: qualified interpreters and information written in other languages. Also, we can set up telephone calls so you may be present when her doctor is discussing her health and plan of care. (Refer to Table above.)</p> <p>I know that this is very difficult for you and your Sister. I wish it was different. Thank you for your understanding and partnership while we do everything possible to stop the spread of this infection.</p>