



Prior to Admission (advance care planning for home, clinic, nursing facility, etc.)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Check-in with patient/family [take emotional temperature before diving into conversation]	“How are you doing with all of this?” “Is there someone else you want to be a part of our conversation?”
Ask directly about COVID	“What have you been thinking about COVID and your situation?”
Lay out your concerns [consider outlining expected prognosis using the COVID-19 Prognostication Guide]	“I want us to be prepared, just in case. The best case is that you don’t get the virus. The worst case is that you get it despite our precautions. While there is always hope, based on what we’ve seen with other COVID patients in our community, you have a [] risk of hospitalization/intubation/death.”
Motivate to talk about what matters & choose a proxy	“If things took a turn for the worse, what would matter most as we care for you?” and/or “What is most important in your life now? What gives you strength?” “Do you have a person who knows you/your wishes well enough to talk to the doctors for you if you got really sick?”
Make a recommendation	“What I’m hearing is that you would...rather not go to the hospital. We would keep you here and make sure you are comfortable for as long as you are with us. Did I get that right?” “...want to go to the hospital if you got sick, but would want to avoid things like a breathing machine or CPR because those would result in a quality of life you find unacceptable. Did I get that right?” “...want to go to the hospital if you got that sick, and you would consider things like intubation or CPR if you got worse. This is a difficult situation, and doctors at the hospital would likely talk to your family more if that happened.”
Expect emotion	“This can be hard to think about and to talk about.”
Record the discussion	“Thank you for sharing this with me. I’m going to write down what we talked about in your chart. It’s really helpful for me and for your family/loved ones to know how best to care for you.”



<https://vimeo.com/401221011>

Visitation Restrictions (for clinic, nursing facility, hospital, etc.)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
For Patients	“This is hard. The risk of spreading the virus is so high that I’m sorry to say we cannot allow visitors. They will be in more danger if they come into the hospital. I wish things were different. We can help you be in contact electronically; I realize that is not the same.”
For Family/Loved Ones *[consider completing “Meet My Loved One” document together]	“The risk of spreading the virus is so high that I’m sorry to say we cannot allow visitors. We can help you be in contact electronically. I wish I could let you visit, because I know it’s important. Sadly, it’s not possible now.” “Would you fill out this sheet* that tells us more about your loved one and how we can best care for them in your absence?”



On Admission (later goals of care)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Reframe [first assess understanding, then state clearly where things stand]	"Tell me what you understand about your illness." "Most people who get COVID have a mild or moderate illness and don't need the hospital. The people who most often get severe COVID are older and have existing medical problems, like you. We are doing our best under the circumstances, but it is quite possible that this could take your life here in the hospital."
Expect emotion [first be silent, then add an empathic statement]	Name—"It seems like you are upset." Understand—"I can't imagine how hard this is to hear." Respect—"I see how well you've cared for your dad." Support—"I'm here for you as we figure this out together." Explore—"Tell me more about what you're thinking."
Map out what's important [explore patient/family values before making a plan]	"Could we step back for a moment so I can learn more about you? Can you tell me what's most important to you, what gives your life meaning? Given the situation, are there things that you are worried about or hope to avoid? If your doctors were worried time is short, what would be important?"
Align with values [repeat back what patient/family said to make sure you got it right and they feel heard]	"As I listen, it sounds like what's most important is to not be short of breath or to be in pain, and to make sure that your family is cared for during this time. It sounds like you don't want to prolong this time if the doctors feel that you are not getting better."
Plan treatments that match values [ask to make a recommendation, start with what you can do and finish with what we won't do]	"This is a hard situation. To be honest, given your overall condition, if we needed to put you on a breathing machine or do CPR, you likely will still not make it. The odds are just against us. My recommendation is that we do all we can to help you feel better but not go to the ICU or do more aggressive things if it gets worse, instead allowing you to pass on peacefully. What do you think?"



<https://vimeo.com/401465080>

Resource Allocation (for use ONLY in crisis allocation situations)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Show the guideline	"Here's what our institution is doing for patients with COVID...[state what is most relevant for this patient's risk]."
Headline what this means for the patient's care [start with what you can do, finish with what you won't do]	"So for you, this means that we will care for you on the floor and do everything we can to help you feel better and fight this illness. What we won't do is transfer to the ICU, or do CPR if your heart stops."
Affirm the care you will provide	"We will do our very best to care for you with the treatments we have available. We will continue to hope for the best, and if things don't go the way we are hoping, we will make sure you are comfortable during the dying process. I wish things were different."
Respond to emotion	"It is understandable to be upset. I wish we had treatments available that would help. We are committed to doing our very best with the treatments we have."
Emphasize that the same rules apply to everyone	"We want you to know that we are using the same rules with every other patient in this hospital. We want to provide the best care that we can to everyone in this situation."



On Transfer to ICU (discussing time-limited trials)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Tell the Truth about the problem and prognosis [consider outlining expected prognosis using the COVID-19 Prognostication Guide]	"I know this is a scary situation; I'm worried myself. This virus is so deadly that even if we go to the ICU, I'm not sure she will survive. We need to be prepared that she could die. We will do everything we can including a trial of support with a breathing machine."
Identify specific measures for Improvement [consider daily SOFA scoring]	"We will be monitoring continuously for improvement on the breathing machine. Specifically we are looking at a measure of how sick she is overall (lungs, heart, kidneys, brain) each day."
Make time interval clear	"We will reassess in [] days. If she gets worse in the meantime despite all our best treatments, our team will be honest. Because we are in an extraordinary time, we would not be able to continue the breathing machine but instead would focus on keeping her comfortable for whatever time remains."
Extubate or Extend time trial	"We are seeing some improvement and need to decide whether to continue this level of support for another [] days. That said, the longer it takes her to recover, the higher the chances that she will take a turn for the worse. We will still need to be prepared that she may die. I know that is hard to hear." "I'm so sorry that her condition has gotten worse, even though we are doing everything. Because we are in an extraordinary time, we are following special guidelines and we cannot continue to provide critical care to patients who are not getting better. This means that we need to accept that she will die, and that we need to take her off the breathing machine. I wish things were different."

Withdrawal of Ventilator (when patient is not improving; remember, we never "withdraw care")

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Get ready [provide a warning shot]	"Would it be okay if we talk now? (<i>I've heard from the triage committee.</i>) I'm afraid that this will be a hard conversation."
Understand what they know	"You talked to my colleague yesterday, do I have that right? What did you take away from that conversation?"
Inform with a headline	"I have some serious news. His condition has worsened to the point where I'm afraid he's dying. We are recommending that we remove the ventilator and allow for a natural/peaceful/comfortable death."
Deepen [respond to emotion]	"I wish things were different. I can't imagine what this is like. I can see how much you care about him. I suspect that you never expected the end of his life to come like this."
Equip	"I want you to know that we can make sure he is comfortable. We will pay close attention to shortness of breath, or any other signs of discomfort, and give medications and other treatments that enable him to die peacefully. I want you to know that we are here to support you through this. We will find a way for you to be with him, even if it is by tablet or phone, so that you can say anything you want to say. I'll be right here with you."



<https://vimeo.com/401215857>



At the Time of Death (helping family/loved ones say goodbye virtually)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Lead the way forward	"I am [], one of the [] on the team. For most people, this is a tough situation. I'm here to walk you through it if you'd like."
Offer the things that matter to most people	"So we have the opportunity to make this time special. Here are five things you might want to say. Use the ones that ring true for you. Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you. Goodbye. Do any of those sound good?"
Validate what they want to say	"I think that is a beautiful thing to say. If my [] were saying that to me, I would feel so valued and so touched. I think they can hear you even if they can't say anything back. Go ahead; say one thing at a time. Take your time."
Expect emotion	"I can see that they meant a lot to you. You have been so loving." "Can you stay on the line a minute? I just want to check on how you're doing."



<https://vimeo.com/401476560>

After Death (notifying family/loved ones of patient's death by phone)

Discussion Step	Sample Script
Identify yourself and proxy	"Are you [] daughter? I'm [] at UAB. I have something serious to talk about. Are you in a place where you can talk?"
Notify of death [use clear, direct language]	"I am calling about your father. He died a short time ago."
Respond to emotion [first be silent, then add an empathic statement]	"I am so sorry for your loss. I can only imagine how shocking this must be." (<i>allow for silence; take your time</i>)
Discuss next steps	"Is there anyone else that you would like me to call for you? We can arrange for you to see [], if you'd like. I can ask one of our Chaplains to help with that."