



Chippewa Valley C · A · R · E Coalition

Committed to improving end-of-life care through:
Communication · Advance planning · Resources · Education

Advance Care Planning – Case Stories for Conversation Starters:

#1 - Case Story involving a diagnosis of cancer:

Imagine that you were in good health until five years ago when you were diagnosed with cancer. Your doctor recommended surgery and chemotherapy to treat the cancer and you recovered. For four years you have been well, but over the past year the cancer has returned. You have needed several hospitalizations for more chemotherapy and for several serious infections. Your health has deteriorated, you have become weaker and it appears that the chemotherapy is not working. You are now brought to the hospital with a life-threatening pneumonia. You are unconscious and are not able to tell the doctors what sort of treatment you want. You are put on a breathing machine.

#2 – Case Story involving a diagnosis of a stroke:

Imagine that you are an active, generally healthy adult. You have taken medication for high blood pressure for 20 years. Six months ago you were hospitalized for very high blood pressure. After you leave the hospital you are able to resume your normal activities. One afternoon you have a sudden stroke, leaving you paralyzed and unconscious. You are unable to breathe without assistance and you are placed on a breathing machine. After careful evaluation, the doctors say that there is no hope for meaningful recovery.

#3 – Case Story involving a diagnosis of heart failure:

Imagine that you are a patient with a heart condition called heart failure. For several years you have had periods of difficulty breathing because of a weak heart. Generally your doctor can treat these episodes with adjustments in the medications you take at home. A few times you needed to be hospitalized in the Intensive Care Unit because you were very sick. Between these episodes you remain active, although you are unable to walk as far or as fast as you once did. Over the past six months you have had more of these spells and been admitted to the hospital three times – once you needed to be on a breathing machine for a short period. You are now admitted to the Intensive Care Unit unconscious, with a fever, and with difficulty breathing. The doctor puts you on a breathing machine. After careful evaluation, the doctor believes you may have a lung infection in addition to your heart problem. The doctor is not certain whether you will live or die.

#3 – Case Story involving a car accident:

Imagine that you are young and healthy. You are involved in a car crash. You have a head injury and you are unconscious. You have some bleeding into the brain and a possible fracture of your spinal column. The doctors put you on a breathing machine while they work hard to stabilize your spine and remove the blood from your brain. The doctors are not sure if there will be permanent damage or if they can save your life.

In each case story:

Would you want to be removed from the breathing machine?

If “no”, how long would you want to be left on the breathing machine?

Would you want to have a “Do Not Resuscitate” (no CPR) status?

If you are over the age of 18 you should complete a Power of Attorney for Health Care document appointing an agent who would know what you would want in each of the above case stories.
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