



Is Your Patient's Serious Illness the Elephant in the Examining Room?

In recent conversations conducted in three Minnesota communities, **nearly 100% of community residents who were interviewed indicated that they would want to talk with their doctor about the Medicare hospice care option if they knew or understood that their illness was serious or life-limiting.**

Almost all Healthcare professionals who were interviewed believe that the most significant barriers to the use of hospice are patient/family denial or lack of acceptance of the serious nature of their illness.

Consider this:

- What if patient denial or lack of acceptance is actually a lack of knowledge?
- If our patients don't know what they don't know, how will they know what questions to ask?

Here's the situation:

- Patients and their families think that if they have a serious illness, their doctor will start the talk about hopes and goals for care.
- Doctors say that they will have these talks if their patients bring up the topic first.
- Doctors and their patients both think that having these talks are important.

Here's the problem:

- Doctors and patients are each waiting for the other to start the conversation.
- Because of this, these talks may not take place at all. Or, they may take place during a health crisis or emergency, when it's very stressful for everybody.

The goal:

- Have these important conversations sooner.
- When we see our patients with serious or life-limiting illness:
 - assess what our patients know and want to know about their illness
 - ask what is important to them and what they value so they can make informed choices about what treatments to pursue
 - make sure they know what to expect from their treatment choices so they don't operate under false assumptions

Let's work together to move the elephant out of the examining room and ensure that we have these important conversations sooner. A new resource tool, *Is Your Serious Illness the Elephant in the Examining Room?* was developed for communities to encourage patients to ask several questions to get the conversation started. If you have patients with serious or life-limiting illness, you or your office staff can provide this patient resource tool at an office or hospital visit. This may help patients be more comfortable in knowing what to ask.

In addition to the patient resource tool, the second attached sheet lists additional information on end of life care and local resources you can utilize to ensure that these important conversations can occur.

This information was produced in support of Stratis Health's Targeting Resource Use Effectively (TRUE) hospice utilization improvement project. Project TRUE is intended to help eligible patients get into hospice care sooner, and to increase appropriate referrals to and utilization of hospice in Minnesota through the identification of barriers to access. Stratis Health is a nonprofit organization that leads collaboration and innovation in health care quality and safety, and serves as a trusted expert in facilitating improvement for people and communities. TRUE is a special innovation project funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS).