



Communication Tips for 5 Common Conundrums in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Created by SHM's Patient Experience Special Interest Group



Conundrum #1

Patients with COVID-19 fearful of their clinical prognosis.

Hear and Heed: "What have you been thinking about COVID and how it impacts you?"; "What worries you most today?"; "Is there anything you want us to know if your disease gets really bad?"

Help Navigate: "Our team is here for you and prepared to care for you at every step."; "Here are the 3 things we will do today to keep you safe and get better."

Be Honest: "It is normal to be a little scared. Today, we will be doing XYZ, and we hope you will recover. Our team is here for you."; "We might not know everything about this disease yet, but here is what we are doing to protect you and ensure you get better quickly."



Conundrum #2

Meeting patient and family expectations given pandemic restrictions.

Hear and Heed: "What worries you most today?"; "Is there anything else we can be doing during this difficult time?"

Help Navigate: "Dr. X, the oncoming hospitalist, is aware to update your family on your progress at their preferred time."

Heal Communication Gap: "I apologize; we cannot allow visitors at this time. I can see how it seems unfair. These are rules for ALL our patients in order to keep everyone safe. We will make sure to keep you and your loved ones involved and updated."



Conundrum #3

Overcoming barriers (PPE) that limit communication, e.g., lack of physical touch (handshake), facial cues (smiling), etc.

Consider displaying name and photo on gown/whiteboard. Make good eye contact, speak clearly and slowly, lean in, nod head.

Hear and Heed: Listen > Summarize > Ask clarifying questions "I want to make sure I got everything. What have I missed?"

Human Connection: "Tell me one thing about yourself, e.g., favorite hobby/sports team/food?"; "I wish we could see each other's face today. Please ignore this astronaut-like gear I am wearing. I apologize for the inconvenience. I want to know about what's on your mind today."



Conundrum #4

Loneliness and isolation all patients experience during this pandemic.

Hear and Heed: "I realize this experience can make you feel alone in the hospital. What worries you most?"

Help Navigate: "It must be hard to be in the hospital alone. We are here for you."; "Is there a friend, family or clergy member with whom I can arrange a virtual visit for you?"; "Here is how you can call your loved ones (show them how) any time and see/hear them."

Be Honest: "These are tough times. I would feel the same way if I were hospitalized right now. I want you to know I am here for you."

Hope: "I'm optimistic you will soon see your friends and family in person."; "We will fight this disease together and overcome it."



Conundrum #5

Patients in non-COVID unit fearful of susceptibility to COVID-19.

Hear and Heed: "Tell me more... what worries you the most?"

Help Navigate: "I want to reassure you we are taking the strictest precautions and measures to keep you safe (mention measures: Sanitizing surfaces, PPE use, visitor temperature checks, etc.)."

Heal Communication Gap: "I apologize we cannot have family visit given the risks involved. Who from your family can I contact and update today?"; "Should we call your family right now and all go over your plan together?"

Hope: "I realize this is a very scary time. I am confident we will get through this and get you home to your family soon."; "These are extraordinary times, and we will overcome this together."

Reference: The 6H model for patient communication*, created by Dr. Swati Mehta, Director of Quality and Patient Experience at Vituity

Hear their story
Heed their worries
Help them navigate
Be Honest
Heal misunderstanding
Leave them with **Hope**