

What Matters Most? A Curriculum to Advance Motivation and Confidence in Serious Illness Conversations

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the threat of critical illness underscored the importance of timely, meaningful advanced care planning (ACP) conversations. Most residents have not received formal training on this skill. The objective of this study was to improve resident motivation and confidence in patient-centered ACP conversations using a designed palliative care communication practicum and mentored skill-based feedback learning. Internal Medicine residents at our Brooklyn safety-net hospital participated in a 2-hour ACP workshop administered by palliative medicine trained primary care faculty. Focus was on communication barriers around life-altering news, SPIKES framework (setting, perception, invitation, knowledge sharing, empathic listening, strategy/summary) for breaking bad news and role play using standardized clinical scenarios. After the workshop, residents practiced ACP communication skills with a primary care patient, faculty observed and provided feedback. Residents completed a survey before and after the encounter. Results of the study showed that before the intervention, the rate of residents stating they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were confident in ACP discussions was 33% for outpatient settings and 66% for inpatient settings (n=30). Post intervention, 90% and 86% of residents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were confident in having outpatient or inpatient ACP discussions, respectively (n=21). A Wilcoxon signed rank test showed a significantly increased motivation to have ACP discussions, confidence in discussing ACP in both inpatient and outpatient settings ($p < 0.05$). Formal teaching of ACP communication skills improves resident motivation and confidence in having ACP conversations with inpatients and outpatients. Observed structured clinical encounters can be used to evaluate these skills. Timely feedback highlights learner's strengths, areas for improvement and improves resident confidence.

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