

# **Family Conference Role Play Exercise**

**Adapted from:**

## **IMPROVING END-OF-LIFE CARE A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PHYSICIAN EDUCATION**

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## CONDUCTING A FAMILY CONFERENCE

### TEACHING WORKSHOP / ROLE PLAYING EXERCISE

#### Faculty Guide

1. Ask the audience to generate clinical examples of times when a patient and family have had difficulty making a treatment decision. Have they participated in a family conference to discuss treatment decisions? Have these conferences been effective? What are some of the difficulties encountered when working with patients and their families?
2. Review the family conference outline.
3. Divide participants into groups of groups of 7 to 10. Ask each group to identify people to play the following roles: patient's wife, patient's children, patient's daughter-in-law, physician and observers.
4. Read the case history aloud (*Patient Role*), then give the people playing each role the appropriate instructions (the physician just gets the *Patient Role* scenario). Ask them not to read the instructions for other roles. [If you do not have enough participants for a group of 7-10 people, you can reduce the number of observers and physicians to 1 each, and eliminate some of the children.]
5. Ask each group to have the "physician" begin the exercise with introductions and review of medical condition then pause for discussion. Stop them after about 5-10 minutes. How did it go? What worked well? What type of problems occurred?
6. Ask each group to continue and complete the role play. Stop them after about 10 minutes. Ask each group how the conference went. What worked well? What type of problems occurred?
7. As a large group, discuss solutions to problems that occurred. Ask one of the "families" to work with you in front of the large group and try out these solutions for the entire group.

## **PATIENT PROFILE and INFORMATION FOR PHYSICIAN**

Bill is a 63-year-old man admitted to Waukesha Memorial Hospital following a massive MI. In the Emergency Room he is stabilized, intubated and transferred to the ICU where a balloon pump is started. By history he experienced an unknown period of anoxia prior to arrival of the EMTs. On exam he remains unresponsive to deep pain after 3 days.

Bill and his wife Susan have received medical care in your practice for the last 6 years. He has no known prior history of heart disease. Although you discussed advance directives and level of care with him on several occasions during outpatient visits, he and his wife pleasantly deferred making decisions.

On the third day of hospitalization, his wife Susan, and three children join you for a family conference to discuss his medical treatment.

## **SPOUSE PROFILE—SUSAN**

You are the 60-year-old spouse of Bill. You and Bill have had some difficult times during your marriage, but have worked to remain very close. Since Bill's retirement at age 60 you have traveled and camped. You both enjoy being very active. Right now you feel overwhelmed by the suddenness of Bill's illness.

You and Bill have discussed health care before, and Bill told you "I want to live and enjoy life as long as I can. But I don't want to depend upon you, or the kids, or a nursing home. And I don't want to get stuck in the hospital on a bunch of machines. I'm a fighter. Don't let anyone pull the plug on me if I've got a fighting chance of getting back on my feet, but when it's time to go let me go." You promised Bill that you would make the decisions he would want.

**Instructions for the family conference--** During the conference, share these concerns with the group:

- You feel somewhat overwhelmed by events and all the medical information.
- Because so much has happened so quickly, you are unsure about Bill's prognosis.
- You are trying to decide whether you should let Bill go, or whether he has a chance to fight his way back to an active, independent life.

## **CHILD ROLE #1 –JOHN or JEAN**

### **JOHN**

You are a 27 year old son of Bill and Susan. You live out of town and work as a nurse at a community hospital. You talk almost weekly with your parents, and have been very close to both your mother and father. You have not had any specific conversations with your father about health care, advance directives, etc. You do know that your father enjoyed being very active and valued his independence. Several years ago he told you "I never want to be a burden to you or your brothers and sisters when I get older." You feel caught of guard by your father's sudden illness and are very concerned that a decision being may be made too quickly.

### **JEAN**

You are a 27-year-old daughter of Bill and Susan. You live out of town and work as a nurse at a community hospital. You talk almost weekly with your parents, and have been very close to both your mother and father. You have not had any specific conversations with your father about health care, advance directives, etc. You do know that your father enjoyed being very active and valued his independence. Several years ago he told you "I never want to be a burden to you or your brothers and sisters when I get older." You feel caught of guard by your father's sudden illness and are very concerned that a decision will be made too quickly.

**Instructions for the family conference--** During the conference, share these concerns with the group:

- You feel like things are moving too fast and we're not giving Dad a chance to pull through.
- You wonder if everything is being done. Isn't there something new or more aggressive that could be done?
- You have seen a few patients survive weeks of hospitalization in a cardiac ICU and leave the hospital.

## **CHILD ROLE #2 – BOB OR BOBBIE**

### **BOB**

You are a 23 year old son of Bill and Susan. You live in the same community, have just finished college and have been working for the past year at an entry level position at a local bank. You visit your parents almost every week. Last year, after you saw the movie "Doctor" with your parents, your father told you "I hate hospitals. I never want to be kept alive on machines; if I'm ready to die, then let me go."

### **BOBBIE**

You are a 23-year-old daughter of Bill and Susan. You live in the same community, have just finished college and have been working for the past year at an entry level position at a local bank. You visit your parents almost every week. Last year, after you saw the movie "Doctor" with your parents, your father told you "I hate hospitals. I never want to be kept alive on machines; if I'm ready to die, then let me go."

**Instructions for the family conference--** During the conference, share these concerns with the group:

- You are quite certain that your father would not want to be kept alive in the ICU on a respirator and balloon pump.
- You feel guilty that your father has received such aggressive treatment.

### **CHILD ROLE #3 -- JOE**

You are a 30-year-old son of Bill and Susan. You are married and joined at the family conference by your spouse, Sharon. You have been working as an executive in an insurance company. Even though you live locally and feel very close to your parents, you have had less contact with your parents than any of the other children because of your long work hours. You have never had a discussion with your father or mother about health care. Your spouse has talked with your parents more in the last 5 years than you have.

**Instructions for the family conference--** During the conference, share these concerns with the group:

- You don't really know what your father would want done.
- Try to prevent conflict and resolve differences between family members.

## **DAUGHTER-IN-LAW ROLE – SHARON, Joe's Spouse**

You are a 30-year-old daughter in law of Bill and Susan. You are married to Joe who is also at the conference. You are a teacher by profession, and are employed in a local public school. You have had more contact with your parents-in-law than your spouse has. Your partner feels very close to his parents, but sees very little of them because he works long hours. You have had a several discussions with your father-in-law about health care because your own father died several years ago from lung cancer after spending weeks in an intensive care unit. Your father-in-law told you "I never want to be kept alive like that."

**Instructions for the family conference--** During the conference, share these concerns with the group:

- You feel that the decision is really Susan's to make.
- You believe that your father-in-law would want treatment stopped at this point.

