

HOW TO ENGAGE SENIORS TO PLAN FOR FUTURE CARE

Healthcare Proxies and Advance Care Planning

- Discussions on advance care planning and end-of-life care preferences optimally should occur when a person is well, informed and has time and opportunity to discuss with one's physician and family.
- Let the elders initiate the discussion. Don't talk about it before they are ready to.
- When our seniors initiate the discussion about the future, don't miss the opportunity to listen to what they have to say.
- If the decisions about end-of-life issues sound too irrational and negative to you, there could be depression and a doctor should be consulted.
- One may try to 'prompt' thoughts about future care plans by talking about the past, about their friends, about life's meaning, their spirituality and their ideas about the afterlife. An incidental visit to the hospital or a poignant movie may help to start the conversation.
- When discussing about the future care, cover these areas patiently. Do not rush through like a 'marketing survey'.
- Who is the person to make decisions – the designated health proxy – when the senior cannot make or communicate his own decisions? There can be more than one such decision makers.

- Are there any particular choices of where the senior would not like to be cared for? Nursing homes, hospices or hospitals?
- Are there any life-support measures that the senior would refuse under all circumstances? Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (thumping on the chest if one's heart stops), Intensive Care Unit, Cancer Surgery, Chemotherapy, Radiation Therapy, Feeding Tubes, Hospitalizations or even antibiotics?
- Are there any religious or spiritual beliefs that the senior holds dear and would like to be reflected in his care or in the rituals after his death? Would the senior like to practise the teachings or engage in regular fellowship?
- Would the senior like to make a will at the lawyer's office? If not, how would he like to distribute his possessions after his passing?
- Are there any particular issues that weigh heavy on his mind that he hopes to resolve? It could be the care of a child or a disabled loved one.
- If family members find it difficult to discuss future care plans (advance care planning) with the elders, professionals such as their doctors, lawyers, social workers and nurses may be able to support these discussions.
- Advance care planning and end-of-life care decisions are sensitive and important communications. A trusting and caring relationship is a crucial prerequisite.