

Communication challenges with COVID-19.

2. Communication tips for all stages of COVID-19 illness [shared by VitalTalk 2020, adapted for NZ]

Screening - When someone is worried they might be infected

<i>What they say</i>	<i>What you say</i>
Why aren't they testing everybody?	We have enough test kits for everybody that needs one. <i>Tell me what are you worried about?</i>
Why do the tests take so long?	Our labs are doing them as fast as they can. <i>I know it's hard to wait.</i>
How come someone else got tested?	Tell me what your concern is?

Avoiding - When someone is reluctant to seek health care

<i>What they say</i>	<i>What you say</i>
I don't want to see my GP/go to hospital as I'm worried about getting Covid.	<i>I understand this is a worrying time.</i> Our primary concern is your safety. Your GP/local hospital is taking really safe precautions to keep you and everyone safe. <i>Is there something in particular you are worried about?</i>

Triaging - When you are deciding where a patient should go

<i>What they say</i>	<i>What you say</i>
Why shouldn't I just go to the hospital? / Why are you keeping me out of the hospital?	<i>"Tell me what your concern is?"</i> <i>"I can see why you are worried/ upset/ frustrated."</i> "Our primary concern is your safety. Right now, we are making sure that everyone who needs hospital treatment will get it." <i>"Let's check in daily and if your condition changes we can make a new plan."</i>

Admitting - When your patient or their whānau needs the hospital, or the ICU

<i>What they say</i>	<i>What you say</i>
Does this mean I have COVID19?	We will need to test you with a nasal swab, and we will know the result by tomorrow. <i>It is normal to feel stressed when you are waiting for results.</i>
How bad is this?	From the information I have now your situation is serious enough that the best place for you is hospital. They will run some more tests and work out how best to take care of you. <i>How does that sound to you?</i>

Is my father going to make it?	I imagine you are scared. Here's what I can say: things are really uncertain, and he is sick enough that he may not make it. <i>If time was short, what would be important?</i>
Are you saying that the whānau can't visit?	It's really hard for everyone at the moment. Let's check what the current restrictions are, and then make a plan. If you can't visit, we can help you talk and see him in other ways. <i>I wish things were different...</i>

Counselling - When emotions are running high

What they say	What you say
I'm scared.	This is such a tough situation. <i>I think anyone would be scared.</i> Could you share more with me?
I need some hope.	Tell me about the things you are hoping for? <i>I want to understand more.</i>
You people are incompetent!	I can see why you are not happy with things. <i>I am willing to do what is in my power to improve things for you.</i> What could I do that would help?
Is there someone more senior in charge?	I can see you are frustrated. <i>I will ask the doctor/ the charge nurse/ the consultant to come and see you as soon as they can. Please realize that they are juggling many things right now.</i>
Do I need to say my goodbyes?	"It sounds like you are worried she may die soon. <i>Tell me what's going through you mind?</i> " "I think you are right, time might be short..."

Deciding - When things aren't going well, goals of care, resuscitation status

What they say	What you say
I want everything possible. I want to live.	We are doing everything we can. This is a tough situation. <i>What do I need to know about you to do a better job taking care of you?</i>
I don't think my grandmother would have wanted this.	Let's talk about what she would have wanted. Can you tell me what she considered most important in his life? <i>What meant the most to her, gave her life meaning?</i>
I don't want to end up being a vegetable or on a machine.	"Thank you, it is very important for me to know that. <i>Can you say more about what you mean?"</i>
I am not sure what my grandfather wanted—we never spoke about it.	"This is a really hard. To be honest, I'm concerned he won't survive this regardless of what we do. I know this is not what you wanted to hear... " <i>"My recommendation is that we do everything we can to make sure he is comfortable and not suffering. "</i> "I know that is hard to hear. What do you think?"

Resourcing - When limitations force you to choose, and even ration

What they say	What you say, and why
My grandmother needs the ICU! Or she is going to die!	"I know this is a scary situation, and I am worried for your grandmother myself. <i>She is so sick that even if we transfer her to intensive care, she almost certainly will not make it.</i> We will do everything we can to support her on the ward, and if she is dying do our best to make sure she doesn't suffer."
Are you just discriminating against her because she is old / Māori / Pacific/Asian/other?	I can imagine that you may have had negative experiences in the past with health care simply because of who you are. That is not fair and I wish that things had been different. I do not want people to be treated by the colour of their skin/age/ethnicity/disability either. <i>We are using guidelines that were developed for all of us to prepare for times like this so that no one is singled out.</i>
It sounds like you are rationing.	"I wish we had enough for everyone. And I know this hard to hear..."
Can't you get 15 more ventilators from somewhere else?	Our ICU place have been already increased as much as we can. <i>I realize that is really disappointing to hear.</i>

Looking after yourself:

Anticipating - When you're worrying about what might happen

What you might be thinking/feeling	What you can do
I'm worried that the patient's son is going to be very angry.	Before you go in the room, take a moment for one deep breath. <i>Be curious - what's the anger about?</i> Love, responsibility, fear, worry?
I feel helpless that this person can't go to ICU and that she is going to die.	<i>Remember what you can do:</i> you can hear what she's concerned about, you can explain what's happening, you can help her prepare, you can be present, you can show her you care, you can be a fellow human being alongside another. Sometimes the most important therapeutic intervention is being present. These are gifts.
I have been working all day with infected people and I am worried I could be passing this on to the people who matter most.	Talk to them about what you are worried about. You can decide together about what is best. There are no simple answers. <i>But worries are easier to bear when you share them.</i>
I am afraid I don't care as much as I did, and I am afraid of burnout.	Can you look for moments every day where you connect with someone, share something, enjoy something? <i>It is possible to find little pockets of peace even in the middle of a storm.</i>

Grieving - When you've lost someone

What I'm thinking	What you can do
I should have been able to save that person.	Notice: <i>am I being hard on myself?</i> Could I step back and just acknowledge how I feel? Maybe it's sadness, or frustration, or just fatigue. Those feelings are normal. And these times are distinctly abnormal.
OMG I cannot believe we don't have the right equipment / how mean	Notice: <i>am I catastrophising?</i> Is it actually about something else? Like how sad this is, how powerless I feel, how overwhelmed I am? Under

that person was to me / how
everything seems to be falling apart

these conditions, such thoughts are to be expected. But we don't
have to let them suck us under. Can we notice them, and feel them,
maybe share them?

And then ask ourselves: ***can I step into a less reactive, more balanced
place even as I move into the next thing?***