

# SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION GUIDE: MORE, EARLIER, BETTER CONVERSATIONS

Palliative Care & End of Life Services  
Clinical Practice Bulletin

## WHAT IS A SERIOUS ILLNESS?

Kelly (2014) defined serious illness as a condition that:

- Carries a high risk of death over the course of a year
- Has a strong, negative impact on quality of life and functioning in life roles
- Is highly burdensome to a person and their family

## WHAT IS A SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION?

A Serious Illness Conversation (SIC) is a clinician-initiated discussion with an individual living with a serious illness that:

- Asks the individual about **wishes, values and preferences**
- **Occurs early** in an illness, and is **reviewed** over time
- Shares prognosis, *when* appropriate
- Provides a foundation for making future decisions
- De-emphasizes treatments and procedures
- Is valuable and therapeutic even if medical decisions are not being made.

It is *not* solely focused on medical decisions, and it is *not* a MOST or code status conversation.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSIDER HAVING A SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION?

There are several screening tools that clinicians can use when identifying who would benefit from a SIC, and when.

- Ask yourself the Surprise Question:  
**Would I be surprised if this person died in the next 1-2 years?**  
If the answer is 'No' then the clinician should consider having a SIC with that person.
- [SPICT](#): Identifies people whose health is deteriorating by considering general indicators of poor or deteriorating health, and clinical indicators of one or multiple life-limiting conditions.
- [iPall](#): Identifies who would benefit from a palliative approach to their care



## WHO SHOULD BE HAVING SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATIONS?

MDs, NPs, RNs, RPNs, LPNs and Allied Health providers who are caring for people living with a serious illness.

## WHAT IS THE SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION GUIDE?

The Serious Illness Conversation Guide (SICG) is an evidence based, patient tested framework that guides clinicians through the conversation with key steps to support the flow and align with patient-tested language that will elicit reflection and expression of wishes, values and preferences. The guide helps to ensure a meaningful and successful conversation.

To increase clinicians' competence and confidence, workshops are available to educate health care professionals on the Serious Illness Conversation Guide in iLearn.

Search Course ID #2301

## PRACTICE PEARLS & RESOURCES

Trained SICG Facilitators across Interior Health are offering 3 hour CME accredited SICG workshops (virtual or in-person) for interested health care professionals.

Curious to know more?

Contact [Shannon.Paul-Jost@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:Shannon.Paul-Jost@interiorhealth.ca) or [Vicki.Kennedy@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:Vicki.Kennedy@interiorhealth.ca)

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