



Professional Module: Assisting Patients with Life Planning

Introduction

Before we get started, let's revisit the difference between a care plan and a life plan.

- A care plan is a documented set of actions that outline and complement the patients assessed health. It specifies the clinical measures to treat their condition, ensure safety and comfort, and creates a record of care provided.
- A life plan is the patients' personal goals while being treated under the care plan. For example, if an ESRD patient feels well enough to work and wishes to continue working, his or her care plan should consider the patients' work hours and best as possible, accommodate dialysis services around that

Getting Started with a Patients' Life Plan

Get to know the patients. Initially, ask them about their personal goals or wishes. Some patients might readily express a list of personal goals, and some may even have their goals written down. This is a life plan.

Below are several ways the dialysis staff can get involved:

- Social workers:
 - ◇ Play an important role in uncovering patients' goals such as getting involved in the community, working, caring for grandchildren, maintaining their card group, exercising, traveling etc., For example, the social worker uncovers a patient wants to remain active in their Bingo group.
- Dietitians:
 - ◇ Help the patient achieve their personal goals through the proper maintenance of fluids and diet so the patient feels the best they can.
 - ◇ Encourage the patient to maintain his/her diet and fluid intake during the Bingo snack breaks by bringing their own snacks.
- Nurses and technicians:
 - ◇ Acknowledge good labs. This inspires and motivates the patient to have consistently good labs.
 - ◇ Support patients by acknowledging the success of their care plan and backing patients' personal goals whenever possible.



Support and Guidance

Offer support and guidance on achieving their goals. Here are some suggestions to get started:

- Make the patient's goal your goal too!
- Ask the patient to list some possible ways to achieve the goal.
- Help the patient choose one activity. Too many activities may be overwhelming and less feasible. It also increases the risk of failure.
- The more specific the activity, the more likely it will be accomplished. A second round of brainstorming may help determine if the activity is feasible for the patient's condition.
- Help the patient be specific and realistic. If he or she is too ambitious, coach the patient to set a less ambitious goal in the beginning and to increase activity over time.
- The patient may need a little time to consider the amount of time they have available to commit to the goal or activity. Encourage patients to think about the best time of day to work on accomplishing the goal and to consider how frequently they will need to work on it.¹

Tips to Stay on Track

A life plan is constantly evolving and changing. Regardless of the changes to their goals, always set aside time to connect with the patients about their personal aspirations and goals.

When discussing life plan goals with a patient, devote enough time to listen to the patient. If the patient has many goals, help them narrow down what is most important, and decided where they would like to start.

Suggestions if patient are having difficulty sticking to their plan:

- Recommend they reach out to a family member or friend to help them stay focused.
- Patients may want to consider having a family member or friend be their accountability partner. An accountability partner will assist them with staying on track to meet their goals. An accountability partner provides support in addition to accountability, both of which add to sustaining positive change.²
- Celebrate when the patient reaches goals or milestones. Encourage them to continue their journey to meet other goals.

Dialysis staff can coach, offer encouragement, and tips for success. Instead of dictating care plans to patients, ask questions. For example, "Help me understand. Why is this difficult?" Said differently, if people do not adopt healthy habits, there is always a reason. Our job is to understand these reasons and help the patient address barriers to healthier living.³

¹ Engaging Patients in Collaborative Care Plans <https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2013/0500/p35.html>. Accessed on June 2, 2022

² How to Plan Your Life <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/importance-time-management/life-planning/>. Accessed on June 2, 2022.

³ Engaging Patients in Collaborative Care Plans <https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2013/0500/p35.html> . Accessed on June 2, 2022.