Conversation Stopper:

What’s Preventing Physicians from Talking With Their Patients About End-of-Life and Advance Care Planning

Media Webinar – April 14, 2016
Logistics

• Audio part of the call is at: 866-740-1260
  Password: 6875496 (no audio through the computer).

• Given the number of people on the call, we have muted the line to ensure good audio quality.

• If you would like to ask a question, please send us a chat (We will answer questions at the end).

• We are recording the presentation.

• Write to marcus.escobedo@jhartfound.org or ewalker@aboutscp.com to receive poll materials.
Presenters

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President  
The John A. Hartford Foundation

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Partner  
PerryUndem Research/Communication

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Co-director of the Cambia Palliative Care  
Center of Excellence, University of Washington  
School of Medicine and co-founder of Vital Talk
Tresa Undem, MA
Partner
PerryUndem Research/Communication
Research methods.

The survey includes:

N = 736 total physicians
N = 470 primary care providers/internists
N = 266 specialists
• N = 85 oncologists
• N = 87 pulmonologists
• N = 94 cardiologists
N = 202 California physicians

Margin of sampling error:

• For total = ± 3.6 percentage points.
• For internist/primary care provider = ± 4.5
• For specialist = ± 6.0
• For California physicians = ± 6.9

Conducted by telephone from February 18 to March 7, 2016.
Research goals + overview of findings.

Goal:
Explore current physicians’ experiences billing Medicare for conversations with their patients around advance care planning, motivations to have conversations, as well as barriers.

Overview of findings:
The survey finds that virtually all physicians consider these conversations important, while only a fraction have billed Medicare so far this year. Barriers are both structural – such as not having a formal assessment process in place – and attitudinal, such as sometimes feeling uncertain about what to say in these conversations with patients. Most say they have not received formal training on end-of-life conversations.
More than half see patients 65 and older everyday or almost everyday – but most are not talking to patients about advance care planning as frequently.

How often do you see patients 65 and older who you would not be surprised if they died within the next year? Do you see these patients:

- Everyday or almost everyday: 53%
- Several times a week: 21%
- At least once a week: 31%
- At least once a month: 11%
- Less often than that: 9%

How often do you talk to patients 65 and older about issues related to advance care planning or end-of-life care?

- Everyday or almost everyday: 21%
- Several times a week: 21%
- At least once a week: 20%
- At least once a month: 15%
- Less often than that: 6%

Those most likely to be talking about issues related to advance care planning are:

- Physicians working in a hospital setting (61% at least several times per week)
- Those who have had formal training on end-of-life conversations (62%)
- Respondents who say their practice or health system has a formal system for assessing patients’ end-of-life wishes and goals (63%)
Have you had any training specifically on talking with patients and families about end-of-life care, or not?

Less than a third has had training on the issue.

29% Had training

Respondents most likely to have had training include younger physicians and those with a racially and ethnically diverse patient population. Two-thirds of physicians seeing patients nearly everyday who are near end of life do not have specific training on these conversations.

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<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients &lt;25% diverse</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients 25%+ diverse</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees patients 65+ almost everyday+</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees patients 65+ several times/wk or less</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under age 50</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over age 50</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>73%</td>
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Similarly, less than a third says their practice has a formal system for assessing patients’ end-of-life wishes and goals for care.

In your practice or health care system, is there a formal system for assessing patients’ end-of-life wishes and goals of care, or not?

Physicians working in hospital settings are more likely to report a system in place than those in a mostly office or clinic based setting. Those who are having frequent conversations with patients around advance care planning are also more likely to report having a formal assessment system in place.

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<tr>
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<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly office/clinic based setting</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mostly hospital setting/both equally</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks to patients about advance care planning (ACP) issues once/wk+</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks to patients about ACP issues less often</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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A small majority says their EHR system indicates whether a patient has an advance care plan.

Is there a place in your electronic health record system that indicates whether or not a patient has an advance care plan? This might be a check box or a yes or no indicator.

Yes, there is a place in the EHR: 59%

No, there is not a place: 24%

DK/No EHR: 17%

Does your electronic health record system allow you to see the actual contents of a patient’s advance care plan?

Yes: 54%

No: 31%

DK: 15%

n = 671
Compared to the public, physicians are much more likely to have these conversations with their own doctor.

Have you ever had a conversation with your own doctor or health care provider about your wishes for your care at the end of your life, or not?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physicians</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Kaiser Family Foundation Survey: Total Population</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
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Interestingly, physicians who have had the conversation with their own provider are more likely to have had these conversations with their own patients and billed Medicare this year (20% vs. 7% of those who have not talked with their own provider).
Virtually all say conversations about advance care planning are important – half say extremely important.

In your own opinion, how important is it that health care providers have these conversations with patients? Would you say:

- **Extremely important**: 51%
- **Very important**: 38%
- **Somewhat important**: 10%
- **Not too/not at all important**: 1%

Respondents are more likely to say it is extremely important for health care providers to have these conversations with their patients if they have had training (59% vs. 47% of those with no training) or if they have a formal system in place (61% vs. 47% of those without a formal system).
Respondents were presented with the following definition of the Medicare benefit:

This year, Medicare will start covering advance care planning as a separate service provided by physicians and other health professionals who bill Medicare using the physician fee schedule.

Advance care planning is defined as conversations which cover the patient’s specific health conditions, their options for care and what care best fits their personal wishes, including at the end of life, and the importance of sharing those wishes in the form of a written document.

The vast majority of respondents support the new Medicare benefit.

Do you support or oppose this new Medicare benefit that reimburses providers for these discussions?

- Strongly support: 66%
- Somewhat support: 29%
- Somewhat oppose: 3%
- Strongly oppose: 1%
- 95% Supports
Three in four say this new benefit makes them more likely to talk to patients about advance care planning.

Does this new benefit make you more likely to talk with patients who are 65 and older about advance care planning, or not? IF YES: Does it make you much more/somewhat more likely?

- Yes, much more likely: 35%
- Yes, somewhat more likely: 40%
- No: 24%

Respondents most likely to say they are much more likely to have conversations given the new benefit include racially/ethnically diverse physicians, those under age 50, and physicians who are already talking to patients about these issues nearly everyday.
However, most say they have not had a conversation about advance care planning and billed Medicare for it this year.

Have you had this conversation and billed Medicare for it this year? (Respondents who bill Medicare fee-for-service n = 626)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees patients 65+ almost everyday+</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees patients 65+ several times/wk or less</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had end-of-life (EOL) training</td>
<td><strong>19%</strong></td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No EOL training</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System in place for assessing EOL wishes</td>
<td><strong>25%</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No system in place</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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Top motivations: honoring patients’ values and wishes and reducing unnecessary hospitalization.

Here are some potential outcomes of talking with patients about advance care planning, goals of care, and end-of-life wishes. For you personally, how important is each of these as a reason to talk with your patients about these issues?

- You would be better able to honor your patient’s values and wishes: 54% Extremely important, 38% Very important, 7% Somewhat Important.
- It could reduce unnecessary or unwanted hospitalization at the end of life: 52% Extremely important, 35% Very important, 11% Somewhat Important, 1% Not very/not at all important.
- Patients and family members may be more satisfied with their care: 40% Extremely important, 41% Very important, 16% Somewhat Important, 3% Not very/not at all important.
- It could save health care costs: 29% Extremely important, 34% Very important, 27% Somewhat Important, 10% Not very/not at all important.
- It could increase the number of patients who receive hospice care: 24% Extremely important, 33% Very important, 30% Somewhat Important, 12% Not very/not at all important.

The top motivations are consistent across demographic segments.
Biggest barriers to having the conversation: lack of time, disagreement between patient and family, and not knowing when the time is right.

Think about your patients 65 and older with a serious illness. Have any of the following ever gotten in the way of talking to them about their end-of-life wishes? IF YES: how often does this get in the way for you....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Not too often</th>
<th>Never gets in way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You don’t have time with everything else on your plate</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s disagreement between family members and the patient</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re not sure the time is right</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It might be an uncomfortable conversation</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>You don’t want a patient to feel that you are giving up on them</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t want a patient to give up hope</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may be unsure what is culturally appropriate for the patient</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else should be having the conversation with them instead of you</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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</table>

Half of physicians with a racially/ethnically diverse patient base (48 percent) reports being unsure of what is culturally appropriate. Racially and ethnically diverse physicians are more likely than white physicians to feel uncomfortable with conversations.
Almost half say they frequently or sometimes feel unsure of what to say during conversations about end-of-life care.

During conversations about end-of-life care, how often do you feel unsure of what to say? Would you say:

- Frequently 8%
- Rarely or never 20%
- Not too often 34%
- Sometimes 38%
- Frequently/sometimes 46%

Physicians who have had end-of-life training are more likely to say they rarely or not to often feel unsure about what to say (60% compared to 52% of those without training).

Physicians more likely to experience uncertainty around what to say in these conversations include racially/ethnically diverse physicians, women, and younger respondents.
More than half say they find conversations about end-of-life care more challenging than rewarding.

In general, do you consider conversations about end-of-life care to be:

- More challenging: 53%
- More rewarding: 35%
- Both/DK: 12%

Physicians who have had end-of-life training are more likely to say they find these conversations to be rewarding (46% compared to 30% of those without training).
Perception of responsibility does not appear to be a barrier: three-fourths say it is their responsibility to initiate the conversation.

In general, whose responsibility should it be to initiate these conversations about advance care planning with Medicare patients:

- Your responsibility: 75%
- The patient or family’s responsibility: 15%
- Another doctor’s responsibility: 4%
- A different type of health care provider, like a nurse or social worker’s responsibility: 4%
Recap.

• Physicians recognize the importance of having conversations about advance care planning with their patients – they do not need to be persuaded. A majority feels it is their responsibility more than anyone else’s.

• They support the new Medicare benefit and most say it makes them more likely to have these conversations. However, a large majority has not had this conversation and billed Medicare for it yet this year.

• Those with training around EOL care issues and with a formal system in place are more likely to both have these conversations and find them rewarding rather than challenging – but two thirds say they lack training or a formal system for assessing a patient’s end-of-life care issues.

• The most common barrier that gets in the way of having conversations around advance care planning is feeling they do not have time with everything else on their plates. Other common barriers include feeling there is disagreement between family members and the patient and not knowing when the time is right to have a conversation.

• Another common issue is feeling they frequently or sometimes feel unsure of what to say during these conversations – physicians who have formal training are less likely to feel this way.

• The primary motivations to have these conversations are honoring their patients’ values and wishes and reducing unnecessary or unwanted hospitalization at the end of life.
Thank you.

For more information please contact Tresa Undem at tresa@perryundem.com
Anthony Back, MD
Co-director of the Cambia Palliative Care Center of Excellence, University of Washington School of Medicine, and Co-founder of Vital Talk
Questions and Discussion
Learn More

Please visit our website

www.jhartfound.org

www.jhartfound.org/advance-care-planning-poll

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