

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN MAKING END OF LIFE DECISIONS

General Rule of Thumb – What kind of questions would you ask if the patient was a member of your family?

Suggestions:

1. Ask to speak to the attending physician, not the resident, to get the patient's current status, prognosis, and best care options. You want to speak with the attending, who has the overall picture of the patient's status, and not just a peripheral service provider.
2. Ask for an ethics consult when there are questions about the patient's or the family's wishes.
3. Ask for a palliative care consult.
4. Ask about the patient's level of functioning, quality of life, level of pain, and hope of recovery. If the patient survives, what ongoing treatment(s) will he/she need?
5. Ask if further care is futile, and if so, why. Will further care impact the quality of life and lead to improved outcomes, or will it just prolong life?
6. Ask whether the risks or potential discomfort of interventions outweigh any perceived benefits.
7. Ask whether the patient is actively dying.
8. Ask whether the patient has any visitors.
9. Don't be afraid to ask questions of the physicians and caregivers directly – you do not have to handle conversations through social work or case managers.
10. If the physicians can't answer all your questions initially, don't be afraid to keep asking. Sometimes it takes a while for the physicians to have a full clinical picture of a patient's condition.