

## Is open communication always the right thing in End-of Life communication?

**NARRATOR:** Clear and open communication is always the best in health and social care. Right?

While considered the gold standard in training and guidance for professionals, in day-to-day practice sometimes such open communication does not always seem the best. For example, when someone is very unwell with a life-limiting condition, there can be lots of uncertainty about the situation with decisions needed about the next steps.

The gold standard of clear and open communication presumes that explicit information is useful and that people should have access to it. But this assumption does not account for people's preferences – such as how much information they receive and when.

In a diverse society, there are cultural differences in terms of communication expectations, especially about information surrounding end-of-life care, dying and death. Forcing information onto people who are not ready for the information, or are not wanting the information can cause them unnecessary distress. 'So rather than assume open and explicit communication is best for all, what should you do instead? Here are three tips to help you focus on connecting with a person rather than only being a messenger.

Firstly, if you can, check what the person's preferences are. Do they like to know everything all at once? Would they rather pace the communication? What format of information works best for them – verbal, written, or even images?

Secondly, pick up on the atmosphere – what non-verbal or verbal cues are there? Is the person you are speaking to looking like they can take in important information at this moment? If not, consider first asking a bit more about their illness experience to build a more helpful connection. By picking up on any hesitation and pauses to allow time for new pieces of information to sink in, you can demonstrate authentic curiosity and begin to understand the meaning individuals give to their illness.

Thirdly, take your time. Give the person time. Remember to pause – this can enable reflection and allow someone to ask questions.

Building trust and meaningful connections can take time. Good communication is not just about the words. You can forge stronger and more supportive connections by recognising and responding to individuals' preferences for information.