

**COVID-ready communication skills for Nephrology:** Adapted from *COVID-ready communication skills: a VitalTalk open source primer (2020)*

**Scenarios:**

New renal failure:

| <i>What they say</i>   | <i>What you say</i>  |
|--|--|
| But you just said my kidneys are failing why would you not give me dialysis? | <b>This is a very unusual time. We are trying to use resources in a way that is fair for everyone.</b> We are not able to dialyze you right now/today. We will continue to monitor you closely. I wish things were different.  |
| Shouldn't I go to the ICU then?  | Your situation does not meet criteria for the ICU right now. The hospital is using specific procedures about the ICU because we are trying to use our resources in a way that is fair for everyone. <b>If this were a year ago, we might be making a different decision. This is a highly unusual time.</b> I wish I had more resources. |
| Are you just discriminating because she/I am old?                            | No. <b>We are using guidelines that were developed by people in this community to prepare for an event like this</b> – clinicians, policy makers, and regular people – <b>so that no one is singled out.</b> These guidelines have been developed over years – they were not done yesterday. I can't imagine how hard this is to hear.   |

Chronic HD:

| <i>What they say</i>  | <i>What you say</i>  |
|---|--|
| I ALWAYS get dialysis Monday, Wednesday, Friday, how can you not give it to me today? It is my day! | <b>I can hear you're frustrated.</b> This is a very unusual time. We're trying to use resources in a way that is fair for everyone. Your lab values assure us that <b>you are not in danger if you do not go to HD right now. And, we</b> are all working to get you to HD soon. <b>I wish I had more resources.</b> |
| I have been getting dialysis all week, why would you try to keep me out of this unit?               | <b>I know you are worried and want the best possible care.</b> Right now, the hospital HD unit has become a dangerous place to be. Unless you really really need it, we are not taking anyone to the HD unit. <b>The safest thing for you is _____.</b>  |
| Will you not let me get HD because you think I have COVID? Why don't you just test me?              | We currently don't have enough test kits. We expect testing to become widely available soon. <b>I wish it were different.</b>  |
| Someone else I know at my unit got tested, why can't you test me?                                   | I don't know the details, but what I can tell you is that was a different time. <b>The situation is changing so fast that what we did a week ago is not what we are doing today.</b> I wish it were different.   |
| My wife always comes with me to HD, are you saying she cannot come?                                 | <b>I can't imagine how hard it is not to have visitors.</b> The risk of spreading the virus is so high right now that I am sorry to say we cannot have any visitors in the unit. <b>They will be in more danger if they come into the hospital.</b> I wish things were different.                                    |

Applicable to all:

| What they say  | What you say  |
|--|---|
| My wife needs dialysis or else she is going to die!              | This is a scary situation, and I am worried for her myself. <b>The other things making her sick are so serious that even if we did dialysis, I worry she wouldn't survive.</b> We need to be prepared that she could die. We will do everything that we can for her. <b>I wish things were different.</b>   |
| You people are incompetent!                                      | I can see you're not happy with things. <b>I will do what's in my power to improve things for you.</b> What could I do that would be helpful?   |
| You're treating us differently because of the color of our skin. | <b>I can imagine that you may have had negative experiences in the past with health care simply because of who you are.</b> That is not fair, and I wish things had been different. The situation today is that our medical resources are stretched so thin that we are using guidelines to help us know what to do. These guidelines were developed by people of many different backgrounds. I do not want people to be treated by the color of their skin either. |
| It sounds like you are rationing.                                | What we are doing is trying to spread out our resources in a fair way, this decision is not made by me. <b>This is a time where I wish we had more for every single person in this hospital.</b>  |
| You're playing God. You can't do that.                           | I am sorry. I did not mean to give you that feeling. I am just a clinician doing the best I can. <b>Every hospital is working to try to use resources in a way that is fair for everyone. I realize that we don't have enough.</b> I wish we had more.  |

Please share this document freely.

Direct comments and feedback to [ksciacca@BWH.Harvard.edu](mailto:ksciacca@BWH.Harvard.edu)

Thank you,

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