While advance directives are important for every adult, regardless of age, they are only part of what’s needed to ensure that end-of-life wishes are known and honored. Because health status can change over time, as in the case of advanced illness, patient priorities may change, as well.

With this in mind, consider speaking with your patients about their treatment preferences as their illness advances. Often known as a goals-of-care conversation, these conversations empower patients by letting them define their care wishes in light of their current prognosis.
Three strategies for having a conversation about end-of-life wishes

As you prepare for an end-of-life care discussion with a patient, consider the following:

• **Choose a comfortable setting**
  Make sure you’re eye level with the patient. Choose an area with the appropriate amount of seating for this intimate conversation, in case the patient wants a loved one present.

• **Use the ask, tell, ask technique.**
  Assess your patient’s understanding of the prognosis. Explain their prognosis, taking time to ask questions. The following questions might be helpful:
  
  a. What do you understand about your condition?
  b. What do you understand about the latest problem?
  c. From what you know, do you think your condition will get better, worsen or stay the same?
  d. What do you understand about the care options we’ve discussed?

• **Meet the patient where he or she is.**
  Gain an understanding of your patient’s care goals. Consider asking your patient:
  
  a. What do you hope for within the next few months?
  b. What are you afraid of regarding your prognosis?
  c. What is most important to you?
  d. How do you wish to approach your care?

While some patients may wish to pursue curative treatments, others may choose an option that integrates both curative and palliative care. A thoughtful, thorough conversation can help you identify patient goals and wishes, and help you build a care plan in keeping with those desires.

**Optum is available to help you hold end-of-life conversations with your patients.**
**To learn more, talk to your Optum representative or visit optum.com/pledge.**