



Palliative Institute

Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Community of Practice

More Than Words: Talking With Palliative Patients

January 29th, 2026

Presented by: Jennifer Lam, BSc, BSc RN, Palliative Consult Nurse, University of Alberta Hospital

Facilitator: Sheila Killoran, Education Lead, Covenant Health Palliative Institute

Host: Christy Roulstone, Palliative Institute



Land Acknowledgemen t



Delréé Dumont - *Surrounded by Medicine*

Reminders

- This session is being recorded.
- Please do not disclose any personal health information during the session.
- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you'd like to speak at that time.
- If you experience technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat.

More than words: talking with palliative patients

Jennifer Lam, BSc, BSc RN

Palliative Consult Nurse

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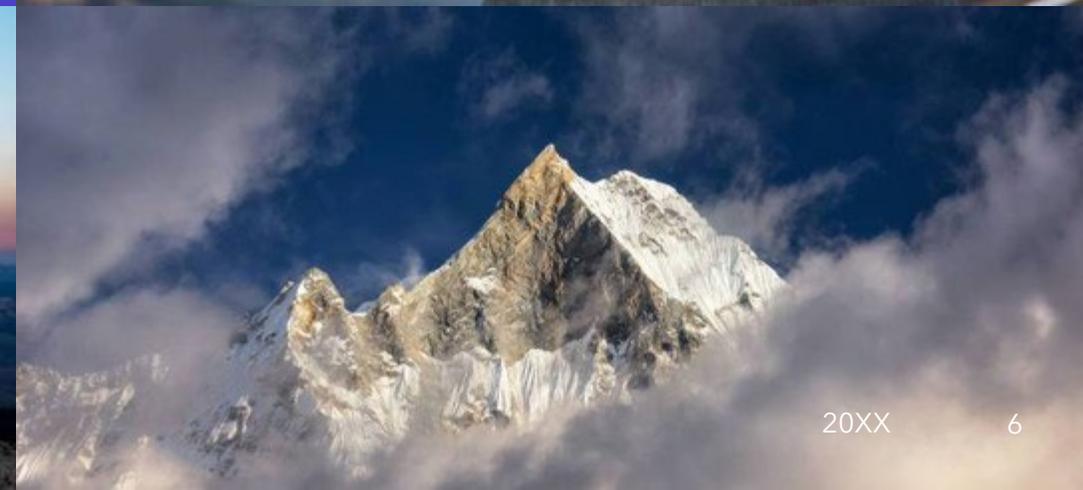


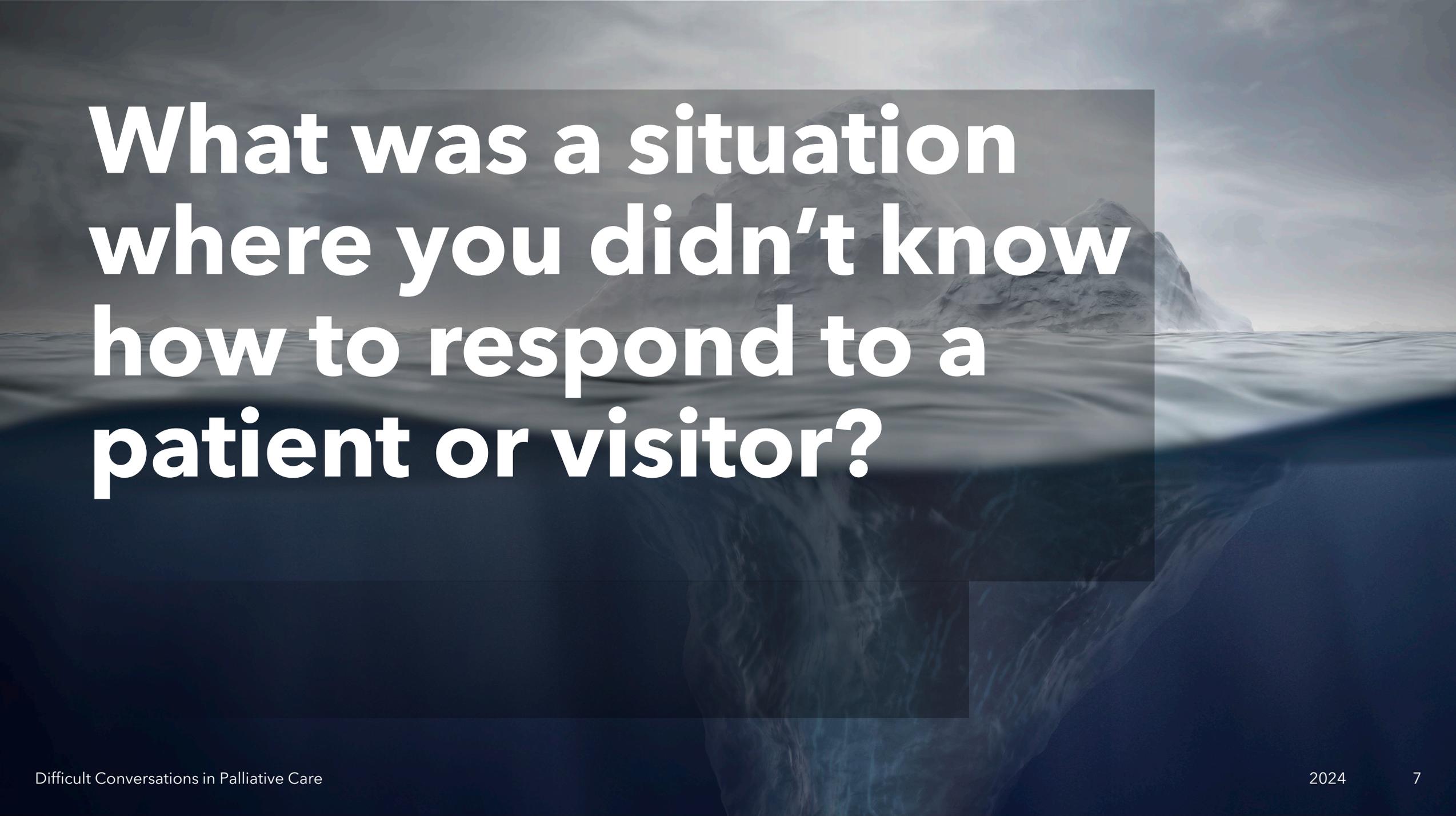
Objectives



- Reflect on your own experiences, identify challenges in communication with palliative patients
- Identify resources to help navigate sensitive conversations
- Put theories into practice
- Discussion/questions

Self reflection





**What was a situation
where you didn't know
how to respond to a
patient or visitor?**

What communication challenges do nurses face when caring for patients at end of life?¹



- patients/families in denial
- word choice and interpretation by patient/family
- knowledge deficit re: end of life: patients/families and nursing staff.

What do we assess for beyond the physical?

**What resources are
available in your area?**

UAH:

Child life

Artists on the ward

Volunteer social visits

Spiritual care

Indigenous liaison

Recreation therapy

Pet therapy

Resources



So, how do we talk to patients?

NURSES Framework³

- Name: the emotion
- Understand: acknowledge the emotion
- Respect: voice appreciation for things patient/family are doing
- Support: provide affirmation that you will support them
- Explore: ask open ended questions to explore the situation ("tell me more")
- Silence: can help you provide a supportive presence

Exercise #1

**92 year old female, metastatic lung cancer.
GCD has just been changed to C1.**

- Patient was unresponsive a few days ago but now is awake. She's confused but able to carry a conversation
- Family wonders if they made the right decision to focus on comfort care
- How do you respond?

Amen Protocol²

- **A**ffirm the patient's belief. Validate his or her position: “Ms X, I am hopeful, too.”
- **M**eeet the patient or family member where they are: “I join you in hoping (or praying) for a miracle.”
- **E**ducate from your role as a medical provider: “And I want to speak to you about some medical issues.”
- **N**o matter what; assure the patient and family you are committed to them: “No matter what happens, I will be with you every step of the way.”

Exercise #2

68 year old male, end stage COPD. GCD M1.

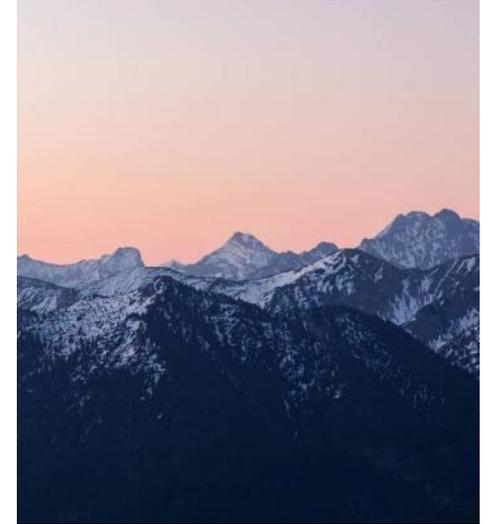
- Patient is agitated, climbing out of bed, calling out. Speech incomprehensible. Pulling off high flow O₂.
- His son tells you that he hopes the patient can "snap out of it" so he can be well enough to go home.
- How do you respond?

Additional resources:

- Serious illness conversation guide (AHS)
- 10 steps to better prognostication (AHS)
- Communication support tools framework (CAPCE program, London ON)

References

1. Seydel, A. , Moutsoglou, N. , Varilek, B. , Minton, M. & Isaacson, M. (2022). Navigating Disharmony. *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*, 24 (6), 328-334. doi: 10.1097/NJH.0000000000000909.
2. Cooper RS, Ferguson A, Bodurtha JN, Smith TJ. AMEN in challenging conversations: bridging the gaps between faith, hope, and medicine. *J Oncol Pract*. 2014 Jul;10(4):e191-5. doi: 10.1200/JOP.2014.001375. Epub 2014 May 6. PMID: 24803663; PMCID: PMC4870587.
3. [Communication-Support-Tools-Framework.pdf](#)





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Thank you



Evaluation



<https://redcap.link/ds6ibuxf>

Upcoming Session

March 26th 2026 2-3pm MST



Exploring goals of care designations (GCDs): Interpretation and communication

Speaker **Jennifer Zelmer** (RN, MN) will examine the Goals of Care Designation (GCDs) Orders used in Alberta. Interpretation of the GCDs along with communication strategies and resources for discussing GCDs will be explored.

For more information contact: sheila.killoran@covenanthealth.ca

Thank You!

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- Contact us at: Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca

