

Condensed Conversation Guide for Identifying Patient Priorities

Accessible version of the ambulatory guide

The One Thing is what the patient most wants to focus on. Helping the patient formulate “The One Thing” focuses clinical encounters, decision making, and treatment planning for persons with many conditions and complex care. It also helps clarify where there is a disconnect between realistic goals people want and what they are willing to do to achieve them. Adherence is likely to improve if care is focused on what the patient wants to focus on and what is reasonably possible to achieve.

Going through a few preliminary questions helps get to The One Thing. Once you have gone through the preliminary steps a few times, you can go right to The One Thing. Begin clinical encounters with The One Thing.

Clinician steps and suggested questions

Clinician step	Rationale and suggested questions
1. Let patients know why you are asking these questions	People may not expect these questions, so explain the first time you do the specific ask. Suggested wording. “I know we have worked together for quite a while and I know a lot about what matters to you. But I want to understand better how your health and your health care influences your day to day life. The more I know about this, the better we can work toward a plan of care that is right for you.”
2. Ascertain concerns and fears about health and health care	Give the patient an opportunity to share fears and concerns about health and health care so you can tailor treatment and education. Suggested wording. “What concerns you most when you think about your health and health care? What fears and worries do you have about your health as you think about the future?”
3. Ask two preliminary questions about priority goals and the health problem or health care issue connected to those goals	Question 1. “What would you most like help with in your day to day life from your health care team?” The priority goal should be as specific, actionable, and realistic as possible. Question 2. “What health problem or parts of your health care do you think is making it more difficult to reach that goal?”
4. Identify The One Thing and address any disconnect between goals and willingness to accept care	Use the patient’s answer to link a health outcome goal to health or health care. Suggested wording. “What is most important that you want us to focus on in your health or health care? If we could help improve this, what would you do more of or do more easily?” Reflect it back. “I think I hear you say that what matters most to you is being less dizzy so you can go to breakfast with your friends. You think some of your medications may be causing the dizziness. Is that correct?” If there is a disconnect, try. “I know you want to reach this goal, but you find this treatment bothersome. Are you willing to try it if that helps you reach your goal?”
5. Make an action plan using serial trials	Align clinical decisions toward achieving the patient’s priority goals. When recommendations are based on what matters most to the patient, you can be more directive. Suggested wording. “There are different things that we could do. But knowing what matters most to you, I suggest we try this.” Use serial trials of care options and measure success against the patient’s priority goal.

Developed for use by clinicians involved in Patient Priorities Care with input from Dr. Susan Block and the Serious Illness Conversation Guide.