Format for a Patient Care Conference

For patients who lack decision-making capacity, it is legally required to get consent for treatment from the patient's medical power of attorney representative or health care surrogate. Often this legally designated person wants others to attend the meeting in which decisions will be made. These meetings are called patient care conferences or family conferences. The latter term is frequently used since most of the time the people attending the meeting are the patient's "family" (either as blood relatives or close friends).

1. **Introduce meeting participants** - if you did not get a chance to introduce yourselves to the patient/family before the meeting, explain the role of the ethics committee, ethics consultants, or ethics advisors; give the family a chance to bring someone for support (clergy); and ask questions - do so at the beginning of the meeting. Everyone introduces themselves and their role. (Make sure someone grabs a box of tissues to bring into the meeting.)

2. The team provides **an update on the patient's medical condition** (physicians, nurses, therapists). Input from the bedside nurse is very helpful to understand the patient's functional level, degree of pain and suffering, and expressed wishes.

   The **family** is given the opportunity to **ask questions** about the medical condition and to **talk about their concerns and values**.

3. Identification of **patient's values and preferences**, if known.

4. The team presents **possible options**.

5. If the patient's values and preferences are known, **select option that the patient would want**.

6. If patient's values and preferences are unknown, **discuss the patient's best interest**.

7. If the treatment in the patient's best interest is unclear, do a **time-limited trial** of therapy with clear endpoints defined.

8. At the end of the meeting, **summarize agreement, describe** what the family can expect, and **explain** their role in subsequent decision making.

9. Set time for **follow-up meeting** if needed.