

Communicating with Patients and Families in Crisis

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Disclosures

- **The speaker has nothing to disclose.**
- **Exhibits coordinated through the Henry Jackson Foundation.**
- **Refreshments provided through the Henry Jackson Foundation.**

Objectives

- **Identify main points in systems theory and apply to family system**
- **Learn skills to counsel and communicate with families in crisis**
- **Understand key steps in conducting a patient/family conference to resolve conflict, share information and build consensus**

Systems Theory

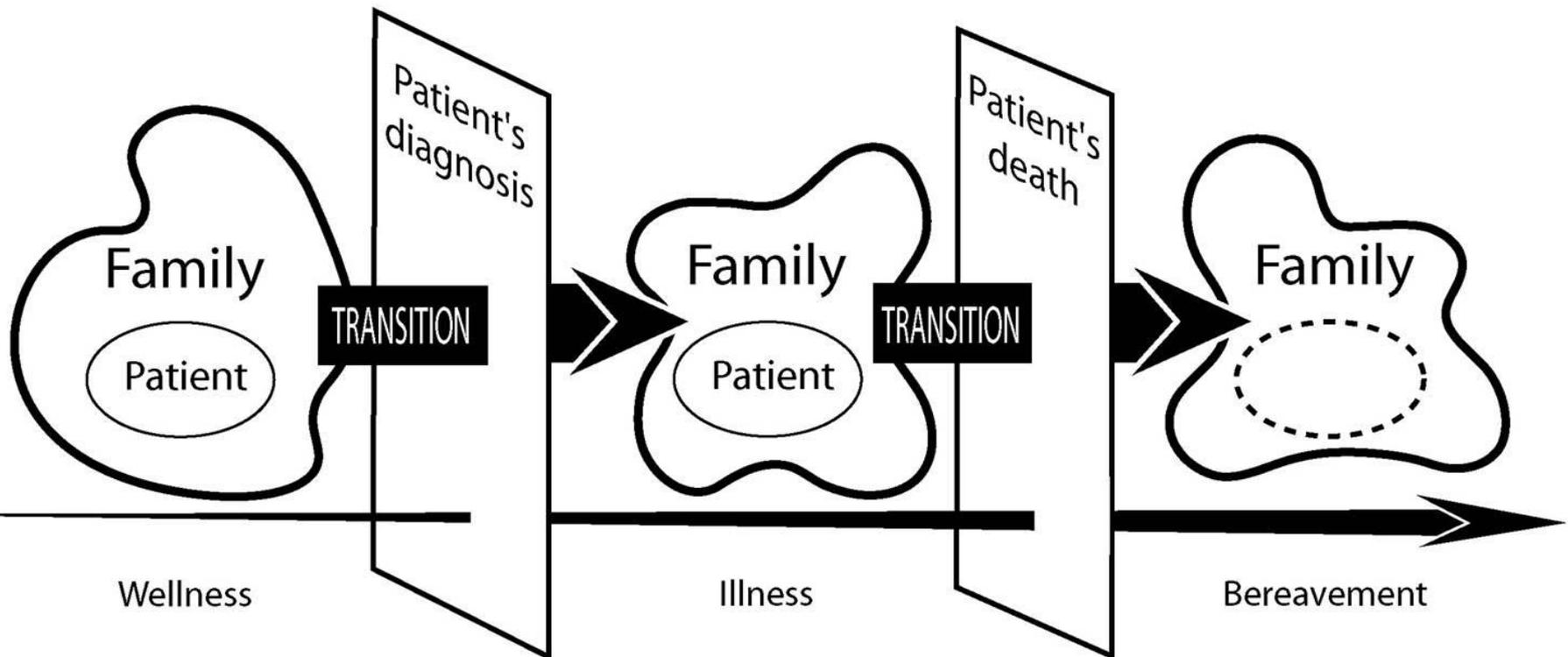
- Explains the behavior of complex, organized systems
- Systems interact and influence
 - Family system
 - Medical system
 - Hospice system

Family as a System

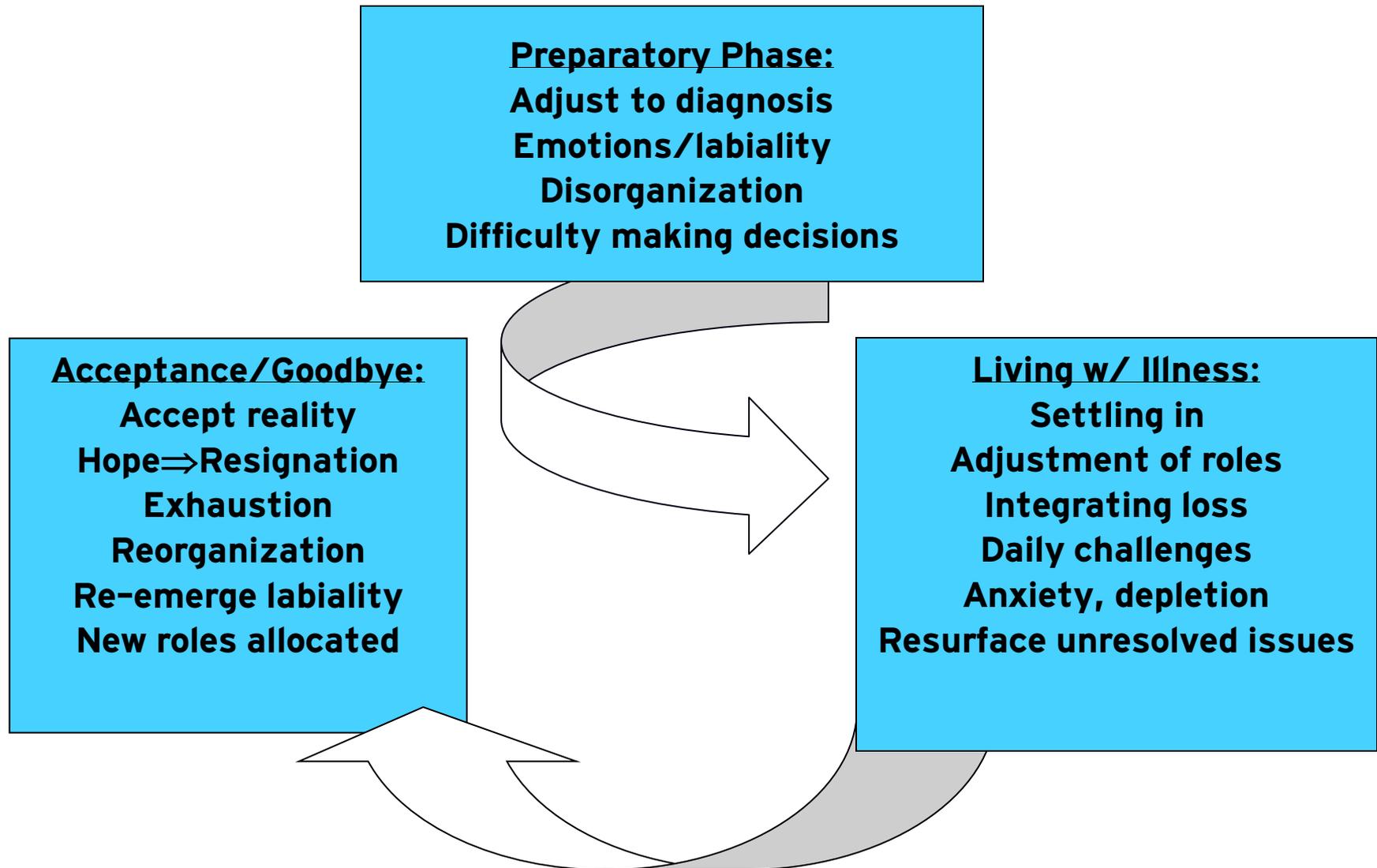
Concepts:

- **Interdependence** *with each member*
- **Mutual influence** – *relationship patterns*
- **Boundaries** – *define membership and represent point of contact with other systems*
- **Homeostasis** – *regulate the environment to maintain stability and comfort*

Patient & Family Transitions



Phases of Family Adaptations to Terminal Illness



Counseling Techniques

- **Joining**
- **Creating a Safe Environment**
- **Actively Listen**
- **Acknowledgement**
- **Validating**
- **Normalizing**
- **Stating what is needed/plan**

Patient/Family Conferences

- **Process Steps**
 - Use counseling skills
 - Can diffuse anger, high emotion
- **When Family Conferences are helpful**
 - Discuss goals of care
 - Review course of disease
 - Patient/family conflict
 - Patient/family/team conflict

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

1. Why are you meeting?

What do you hope to accomplish?

Clarify the goals for yourself

2. Where?

Comfortable, private, with circular seating

3. Who?

Patient, DPOA, family members, key health care professionals

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

4. Introduction and Relationship Building
 - *Introduce self and other*
 - *Review meeting goals,*
 - *Clarify any specific decisions needed*
 - *Establish ground rules*
 - *Each person can ask questions without interruption*
 - *Identify legal decision maker*

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

5. Determine what is known

Tell me your understanding of the current medical condition

Ask everyone in the room

What has changed in the past few months?

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

6. Review medical status

- Current status, prognosis, options
- Ask for any questions
- Defer discussion of decision-making
- Respond to emotional reactions

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

Discussion with Decisional Patient

What decisions are you considering?

Ask each family member

What are your questions or concerns?

How can you support the patient?

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

8. Discussion with Non-Decisional Patient

Ask each person

What would the patient choose for himself?

What do you think should be done?

Ask if the family would like to discuss privately without you or the team present

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

9. When there is no consensus

Re-state the goal

What would the patient say if they could speak?

Use time as an ally

Schedule follow up meeting for the next day

Further discussion

Identify additional resources

10 Steps to Patient/Family Conferences

10. Wrap Up

- Summarize – *consensus, disagreements, decisions and plan*
- Caution – *against unexpected outcomes*
- Identify – *family spokesperson for ongoing communication*
- Document – *who was present, decisions, follow-up plan*
- Don't turf – *discontinuation of treatment to nursing*
- Continuity – *Maintain contact with family and team*

Managing High Emotion

- Be aware of your own emotions
- Listen without interruption
- Reflection

“You are struggling between what you need and what your family needs”

“You feel overwhelmed and somewhat angry”

- Acknowledge

“Thank you for sharing your feelings, it helps me understand and better help you”

Managing High Emotion

- Be curious

“I am wondering...”

“Tell me more about...”

- Summarize and paraphrase

“Let me see if I can summarize what you have said and you can let me know if I am on track.”

Managing High Emotion

- Make a plan

“How can I help?”

“Is there something that would make a difference?”

- Follow up

“I would like to check in with you next week to see how things are going.”

“Please let me know in the meantime if you need to talk.”

Key Take Home Points

- Families are a system with their own set of operating guidelines, rules and boundaries
- Using basic counseling skills will help the health care professional provide patients and families with support
- Family conferences are helpful to make change in a family that is in transition.

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