

Table 21-1: Components of a Discussion About End-of-Life Care

## **I. Making Preparations before a Discussion about End-of-Life Care**

- Review previous knowledge of the patient and/or their significant others
- Review previous knowledge of the patient's attitudes and reactions
- Review your knowledge of the disease – prognosis, treatment options
- Examine your own personal feelings, attitudes, biases, and grieving
- Plan the specifics of location and setting: choose a quiet, private place
- Have advance discussion with the patient or family about who will be present

## **II. Holding a Discussion about End-of-Life Care**

- Introduce everyone present
- If appropriate, set the tone in a nonthreatening way: "This is a conversation I have with all my patients..."
- Find out what the patient or significant other understands
- Find out how much the patient or significant other wants to know
- Be aware that some patients do not want to discuss end-of-life care
- Discuss prognosis frankly in a way that is meaningful to the patient
- Do not discourage all hope
- Avoid temptation to give too much medical detail
- Make it clear that withholding life-sustaining treatment is NOT withholding caring
- Use repetition to show that you understand what the patient or their significant other is saying
- Acknowledge strong emotions and use reflection to encourage patients or their significant others to talk about these emotions
- Tolerate silence

## **III. Issues That May Be of Special Importance for Some Patients with HIV/AIDS**

- If patients have strong treatment preferences, discuss living will or other advance directive
- Consider durable power of attorney and importance of having discussions of treatment preferences, goals, values with that person
- Discuss cultural or religious views, attitudes, and preferences
- Consider discussing preferences regarding place of death and preferences regarding burial or cremation

## **IV. Finishing a Discussion of End-of-Life Care**

- Achieve common understanding of the disease and treatment issues
- Make a recommendation about treatment
- Ask if there are any questions
- Ensure basic follow-up plan and make sure the patient and/or significant others know how to reach you for questions