Anatomy of a Family Meeting
When needed to Discuss Care Plans for a Seriously Ill Patient

Facilitating a family meeting when a patient is seriously ill can be difficult at best. Family members may not agree on a course of treatment or whether to stop treatment. They may or may not want their loved one to continue curative measures. Emotions can run high, creating even more anxiety for the patient. Providence Home Services would like to help you to have a successful meeting. Below are some suggestions on helping this to happen:

Pre-Meeting Preparation
- Arrange a time and a quiet, private place to meet.
- Arrange a clinician conference to clarify prognosis, goals and recommendations. Identify the family meeting leader.
- Invite key clinicians, family members and stakeholders.

Starting the Meeting
- Have each person introduce him/herself
- Find out what the family knows/thinks: *"What is your understanding of your father's illness?"*
- Let the family *"tell their story"*: Learn who the patient was before he/she got sick; let everyone have a chance to talk.

Review Medical Status
- Explain the medical situation in simple terms. Avoid jaron.
- Ask if the patient has expressed preferences for care. *"Did your father ever say anything about what kind of care he would want if he got seriously ill?" "What would your father say say if he could sit up and tell us what he things about what is happening to him right now?"*
- Offer prognosis as a timeframe: hours to days, days to weeks, weeks to months or months to years
- Clarify whether the patient has already appointed a decision-maker and, if not, who is the appropriate surrogate.

Wrapping it up
- Ask if there are any questions or concerns about the care plan.
- Summarize decisions made, arrange follow-up and document meeting and care plan in the chart.

Important Points
- Clarify patient and family concerns and questions and respond to them.
- Keep the focus on the patient.
- Emphasize desire to respect patient's wishes.
- Avoid promises you cannot keep.