

Evaluating Quality of Care - A Checklist

Although there are no "report cards" or accepted national standards yet available for judging quality end-of-life care, there are some questions you can ask to evaluate care. The American Geriatrics Society has developed 10 "domains" or factors that should be considered, and four dozen organizations have concurred. Within each of these domains, we have developed questions that you can ask. You may use these questions to help select providers. They are also helpful if a loved one is dying and you are uncertain of the quality of care they are receiving. Use this check list to talk to members of the health-care team.

Physical & Emotional Symptoms

- Are symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, depression, fear, anxiety, nausea, skin breakdown, and other physical and emotional issues asked about and treated?
- How quickly can a patient in various settings such as home or hospital expect a response to serious symptoms?
- Is the care team willing to provide sedation if nothing else relieves the symptoms?

Support of Function & Autonomy

- Are questions asked about functional activities such as eating, sleeping, walking, climbing stairs, and participating in activities?
- Are limitations acknowledged and dealt with?
- Is help provided to maintain personal dignity, autonomy, and self-respect?
- Do the patient's hopes and fears shape the plan of care?

Advance Care Planning

- Do patients and families get honest information, even when it is uncomfortable to give and receive it?
- Are the uncertainties of prognosis, as well as the best estimates, made available?
- Does the physician ask about end of life care wishes?
- Is a copy of a completed Advance Directive in the patient's chart?
- Is a care plan discussed with the patient, agent, and family?
- Does the plan include how anticipated medical crises will be managed?

Aggressive Care Near Death

- Are the physician and other care providers respectful of decisions to avoid or withdraw aggressive treatment at life's end?
- Will the patient die where he or she prefers to be (for example, home or the hospital)?

Patient & Family Satisfaction

- Are the patient and family satisfied with the decision-making process, the care given, the outcomes achieved, and the extent to which opportunities are provided to complete life in a meaningful way?
- Do the physician and other providers ask questions about patient and family satisfaction?

Global Quality of Life

- Does the physician ask questions about the patient's support system, such as family, friends, spirituality?
- Is assistance provided to obtain additional help from support groups or counseling when the patient desires it?

Family Burden

- Do physicians and other care providers ask about the physical, emotional, and financial impact of the illness on the family?
- Is help provided to assist with the challenges of direct caregiving?
- Are financial concerns recognized?
- Are families provided counseling or other support to help deal with their grieving and anticipated loss?

Realistic Survival Time

- Are healthcare providers presenting a realistic picture of the disease and its course?
- Is the information from various members of the team consistent?
- When it seems that treatment to cure the disease is no longer working, does the physician have an honest conversation with the patient, agent, and family?
- Are alternatives with their pros, cons, and likelihood of success addressed?

Provider Continuity & Skill

- Is the relationship with professional caregivers one of trust, enabling effective communication, and the development of satisfying plans?
- Do the relationships endure over time, even as the care plan moves from aggressive treatment to comfort care?
- Are providers skilled in providing symptom control, rehabilitation, and psychological support?
- Are plans made in one program, such as the hospital, continued for the patient in other programs, such as the nursing home or hospice?
- Is a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order honored in all settings--home, hospice, nursing home, emergency care, and hospital?

Bereavement

- Does the healthcare team offer counseling or other support to grieving families following the patient's death?
- Does the healthcare team refer loved ones to bereavement support groups and experts for serious complications from grief?

