

Improving Medical Trainees' Confidence
and Skills in Serious Illness
Communication: Conversation Guide
Training for Early Learners

April Zehm, MD (Medical College of Wisconsin)

Erin Scott, MD (Ohio State University College of Medicine)

Kristen G. Schaefer, MD (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School)

Juliet Jacobsen, MD (Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School)

Conversations about patients' goals and values improve care, but clinicians struggle with this



De Vleminck, et al. Scand J Prim Health Care. 2013;31(4):215-226.
You, et al. JAMA Intern Med. 2015;175(4):549-556.
Lloyd-Williams M, MacLeod RD. Med Teach. 2004;26(8):683-690.
Case, et al. J Palliat Med. 2013;16(3):230-236.
Weissman, et al. J Palliat Med. 2010;13(5):489-490.
Mullan, et al. J Palliat Med. 2002;5(4):487-496.
Fraser, et al. J Palliat Med. 2001;4(3):337-343.
Smith GM, Schaefer KG. J Palliat Med. 2014;17(12):1344-1347.
Schmit JM, et al. BMC Med Educ. 2016;16(1):297.

“You want me to do WHAT?!”

A conversation guide has successfully been used with practicing clinicians

Could this be used for medical trainees?

<https://www.ariadnelabs.org/>

Bernacki R, et al. BMJ Open. 2015;5(10):e009032.

Paladino J, et al. JAMA Oncol. 2019;5(6):801-809.

Lakin JR, et al. Health Aff (Millwood). 2017;36(7):1258-1264.

Bernacki R, et al. JAMA Intern Med. 2019;179(6):751-759.

SET UP | "I'd like to talk about what is ahead with your illness and do some thinking in advance about what is important to you so that I can make sure we provide you with the care you want — **is this okay?**"

ASSESS | "What is **your understanding** now of where you are with your illness?"
 "How much **information** about what is likely to be ahead with your illness would you like from me?"

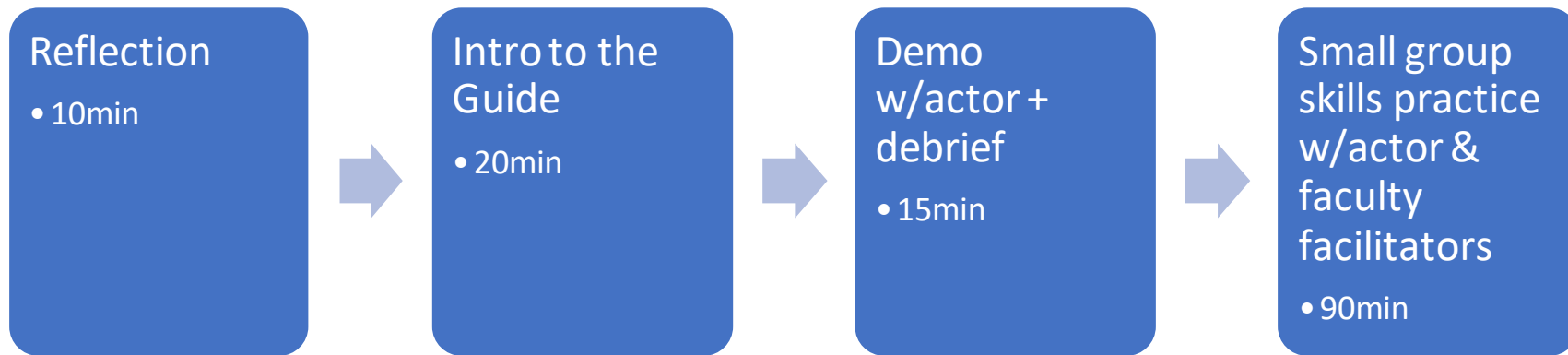
SHARE | "I want to share with you **my understanding** of where things are with your illness..."
Uncertain: "It can be difficult to predict what will happen with your illness. I **hope** you will continue to live well for a long time but I'm **worried** that you could get sick quickly, and I think it is important to prepare for that possibility."
 OR
Time: "I **wish** we were not in this situation, but I am **worried** that time may be as short as ____ (express as a range, e.g. days to weeks, weeks to months, months to a year)."
 OR
Function: "I **hope** that this is not the case, but I'm **worried** that this may be as strong as you will feel, and things are likely to get more difficult."

EXPLORE | "What are your most important **goals** if your health situation worsens?"
 "What are your biggest **fears and worries** about the future with your health?"
 "What gives you **strength** as you think about the future with your illness?"
 "What **abilities** are so critical to your life that you can't imagine living without them?"
 "If you become sicker, **how much are you willing to go through** for the possibility of gaining more time?"
 "How much does your **family** know about your priorities and wishes?"

CLOSE | "I've heard you say that ____ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, and what we know about your illness, I **recommend** that we _____. This will help us make sure that your treatment plans reflect what's important to you."
 "How does this plan seem to you?"
 "I will do everything I can to help you through this."

What we did

- Modified the guide
- Ran multiple 2.5-hour training workshops for M4s (n=81) and IM residents (n=156)



- Collected learner evaluations re: training quality, self-confidence
- Tracked conversation documentation in EMR for 1 yr

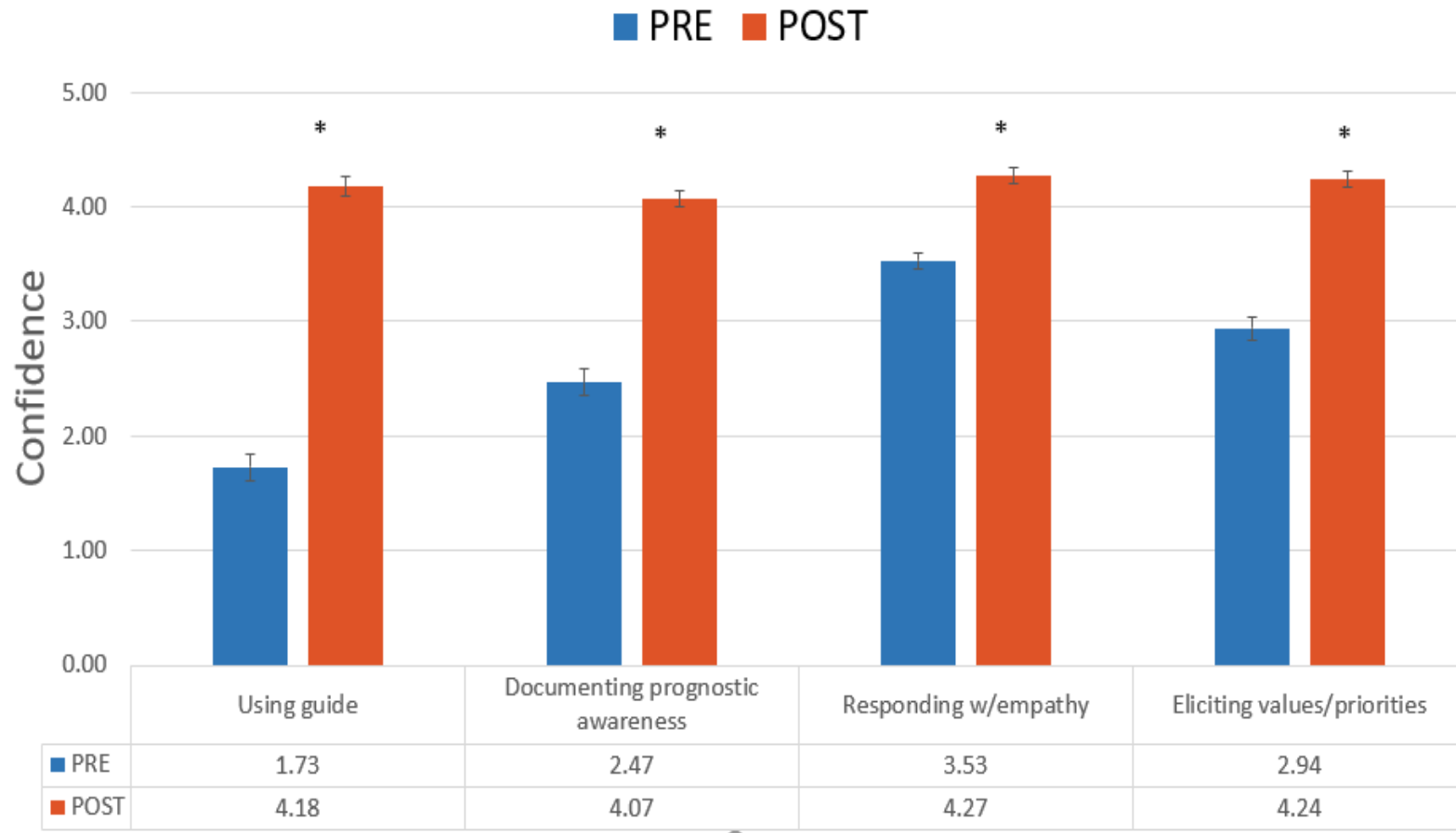
The session was rated highly

- 86% of students and 91% of residents rated the session as “very good” or “excellent”
- >90% of learners would either recommend this training or intended to apply this to their practice
- *“I really liked having a script to follow because it’s really hard to come up with what to say that is both compassionate but also moves the conversation along.”*
- *“Should have this training at least 3 times in medical school.”*
- *“Loved this session. Highest yield of block thus far.”*



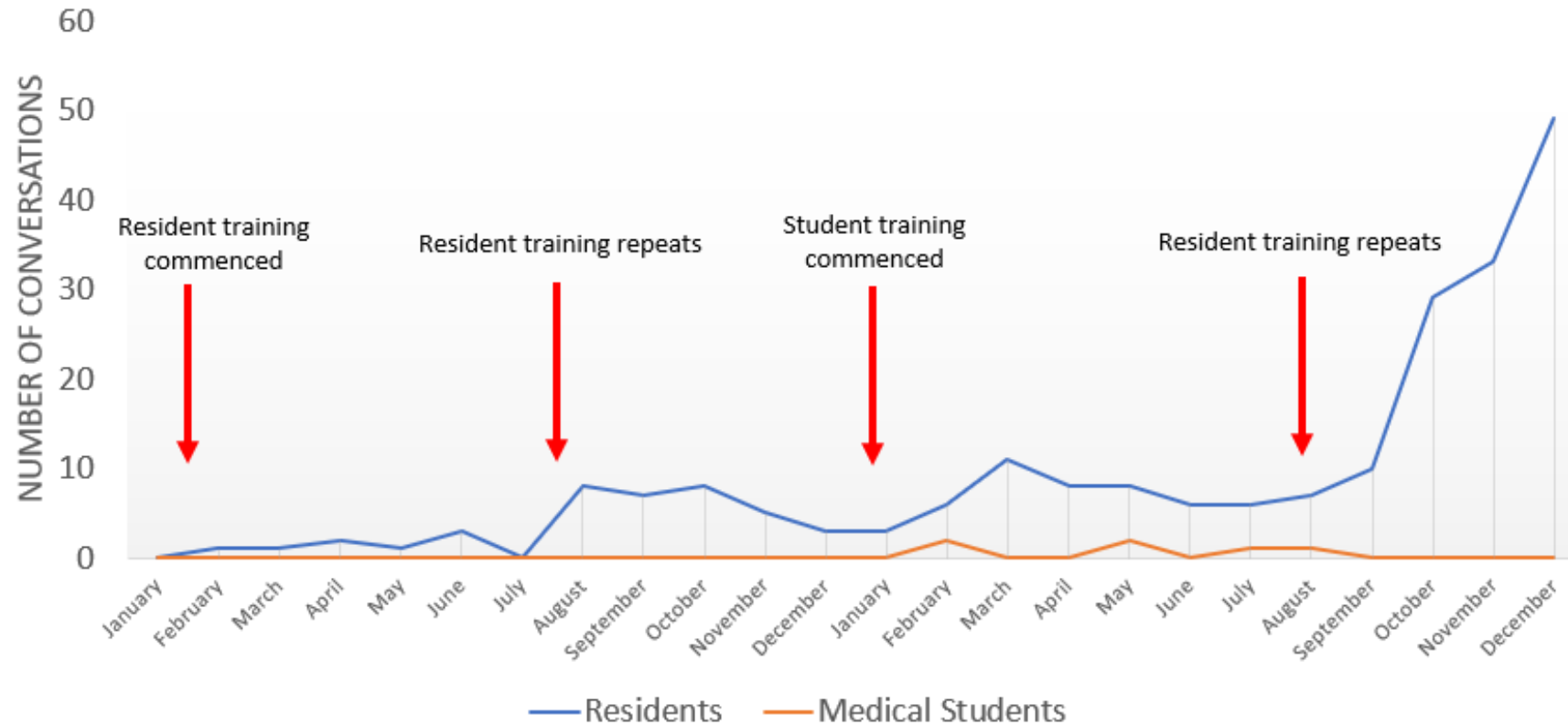
Trainee confidence increased in all communication domains post-training

Resident confidence pre- and post-training



Serious illness conversations increased 4.5-fold in the EMR

Trainee-documented serious illness conversations in the electronic medical record, 2018-2019



Discussion points

- A guide/script for training and clinical use is relatively novel
 - Enables learners to quickly develop competency in a “difficult” task
 - Is efficient: <10 minutes!
- Trainees more flexible than practicing clinicians
- Need to balance rigidity of the tool with allowing clinicians latitude for nuanced conversations
- Experiential learning/role-play is key

Next steps

- MedEdPORTAL submission pending
- Can this be done virtually? In less time?
- Larger, multi-site study: coming to MCW!
- Durability of response
- Move from learner confidence/attitudes assessment to skills evaluation (OSCE)...then patient outcomes

Thank you!

Questions?

