

# Communication as the Cornerstone of Palliative Care Practice

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“Sick people need physicians who can understand their diseases, treat their medical problems, and accompany them through their illnesses.”

Rita Charon, 2007

# National Consensus Project Guidelines

## Communication is key element of palliative care

- Developmentally appropriate and effective sharing of information
- Active listening
- Determination of goals and preferences
- Assistance with medical decision-making
- Effective communication with colleagues



National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care (2009). *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care, Second Edition*. <http://www.nationalconsensusproject.org>

# Communication Barriers

## Physicians

- Uncertainty in prognostication
- Reluctance to disclose frank prognosis
- Fear of eliciting strong emotion
- Sense of clinical failure
- Bearing burden of bad news conversation

# RN Communication Skills Deficits

- Block pt's emotional expression of distress
- Lack skills to express empathy
- Concern for physical care needs over emotional needs
- Difficulty discussing spiritual or religious issues
- Broaching palliative care issues with MDs

Reid-Ponte, 1992; Kruijver, 2000

# Outcomes of Poor Communication

- Patient
  - Futile life-prolonging care in conflict with values
  - Suffering
  - Psychosocial morbidity for family members
  - Underutilization of palliative care or hospice care
- HCPs
  - Moral distress
  - Emotional burnout
  - Economic cost

Deharnais et al., 2007

# What makes for a Good Death?

Essential end-of-life care from perspective of families and professional (hospice) caregivers following end-of-life experience:

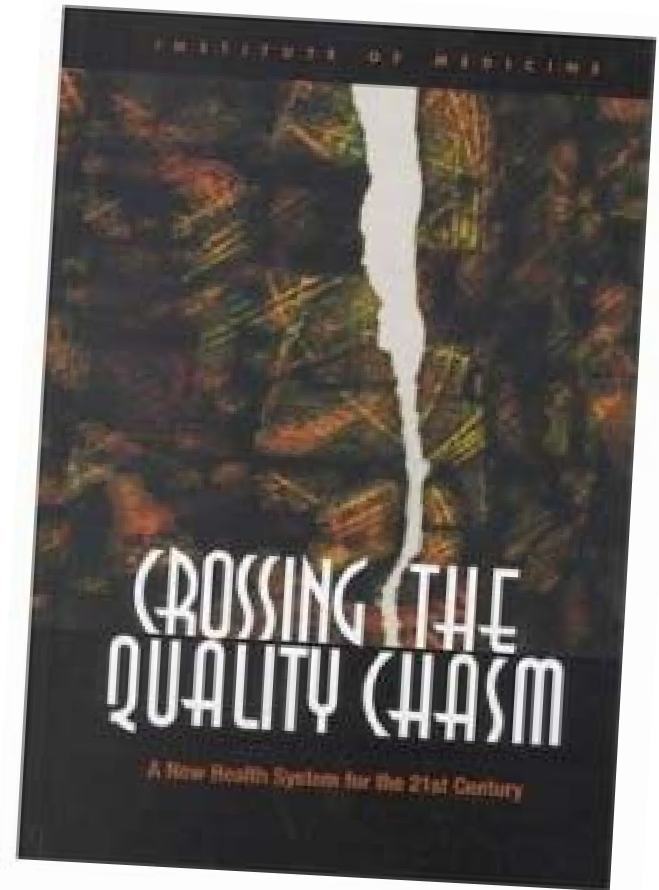
1. Pain and symptom management
2. Clear decision-making
3. Preparation for death
4. Completion
5. Contribution to others
6. Affirmation of the whole person

Steinhauser, KE et al., 2000

# Committee on Quality HealthCare

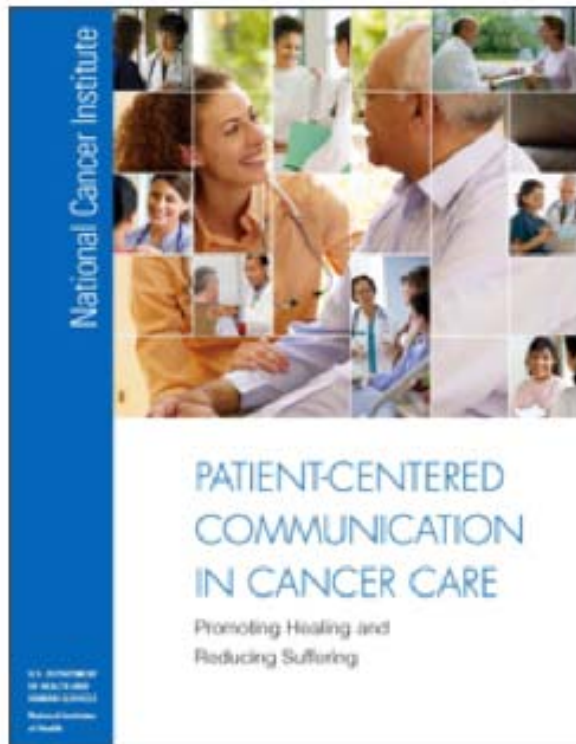
Communication is 1 of 6 key elements of high  
quality care

Committee on Quality of Health Care in America. Institute of Medicine.  
*Crossing the Quality Chasm : A New Health System for the 21st Century.*  
Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 2001.





# National Cancer Institute



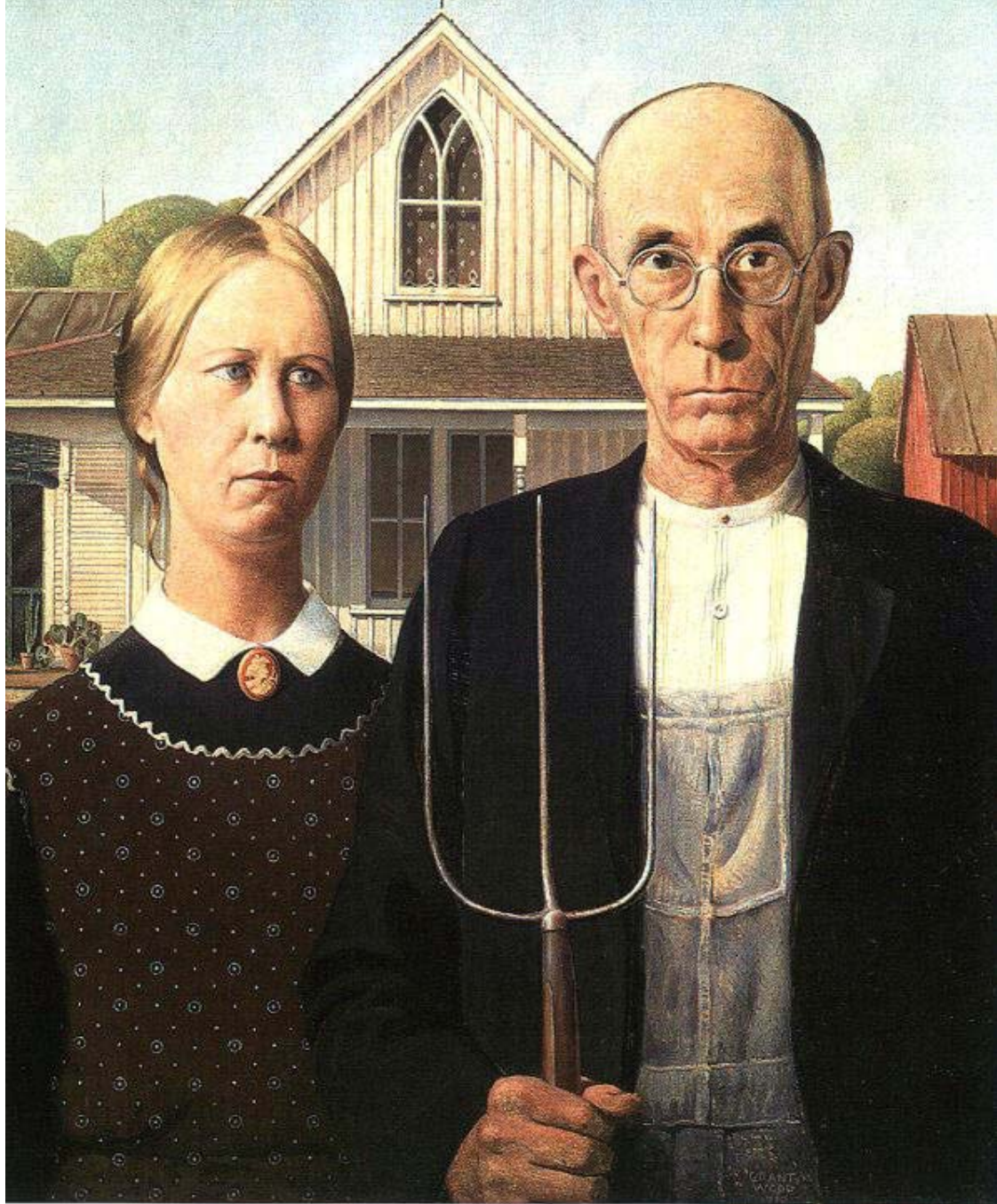
- Patient-centered communication improves health outcomes

Epstein RM, Street RL Jr. Patient-Centered Communication in Cancer Care: Promoting Healing and Reducing Suffering. National Cancer Institute, NIH Publication No. 07-6225. Bethesda, MD, 2007.

# Communication Skills Mnemonics

- BATHE
- NURSE
- ICE
- LEARN
- VALUE
- SPIKES & ABCDE
- SOLER
- COMFORT

Knops &Lamba, 2010; Wittenberg-Lyles et al., 2010



Grant Wood  
1930

# Narrative Competency

“...the ability to listen to the narratives of the patient, grasp and honor their meanings, and be moved to act on the patient’s behalf.”

- Absorb
- Interpret
- Reflect
- Respond

R. Charon, 2007

# Narrative Clinical Practice

- Storytelling is a natural human interaction
- Narratives reveal patient's illness experience
- Narrative competence requires clinicians to deconstruct the illness story
- Develop self-reflection on practice
- Guide patient to new appreciation of situation

“If we do it badly, they may never forgive us-if  
we do it well, they will never forget us.”

Robert Buckman