

Strategy for handling difficult questions

Tracey Bennett is a 44 year old lady, single lives on her own. She has congenital heart disease and there have been three attempts at corrective heart surgery. There has been Daily deterioration in the last four months. Her legs have become oedematous, lost weight, fatigued and is sleeping more. Her reduced mobility has led to incontinence.

Tracey's parents live thirty minutes away and carers visit 3 times a day. She attends day therapy, however during her last visit; the staff suggested she be discharged due to her not being able to participate in physical activities.

Questions

- **Am I dying?**
 - **How long have I got?**
 - **Can I die in a hospice?**
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- Acknowledge the importance/significance of the question:
"That must have been very difficult to ask"
 - Explore the patients perceptions by reflecting the question back to them
 - After obtaining a response, explore if there are any other reasons for asking the question:
"Could you tell me why you have asked that?" or "are there any other reasons that are making you think that you are dying?"
 - Are you the right person?
 - Confirm the patients thoughts
 - Invites the patient to express her feelings and concerns and supports as appropriate
 - Address the concerns the patient raises
 - Answers realistically, avoiding rushing in with premature or false reassurance
 - Screening question, Is there something else?

