

If you have a serious illness, you need to have a talk with your doctor to identify your hopes and goals in dealing with your illness. Then you and your doctor can talk about treatment options and decide on the best choice for you.

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Stratis Health is a nonprofit organization that leads collaboration and innovation in health care quality and safety, and serves as a trusted expert in facilitating improvement for people and communities. TRUE is a special innovation project funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS).

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Is Your Serious Illness the Elephant in Your Doctor's Examining Room?

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Here's the situation:

- Patients and their families think that if they have a serious illness, their doctor will start the talk.
- Doctors say that they will have these talks if their patients bring up the topic first.
- Doctors and their patients both think that having these talks are important.

Here's the problem:

- Doctors and patients are each waiting for the other to start the conversation.
- Because of this, these talks may not take place at all. Or, they may take place during a health crisis or emergency, when it's very stressful for everybody.

Patients and doctors can work together to move the “elephant” out of the examining room and make sure that everyone involved can have these important conversations **now.**

This is how to start.

You can ask your doctor:

- Do I have a serious or life-limiting illness?
- Can my illness be cured?
- If my illness can't be cured, are there treatments that can slow down my illness?
- What kind of care is available to focus on making me comfortable?
- If my illness keeps getting worse, when is it a good time to think about getting supportive and comfort focused care?
- Will you be the one to tell me when to contact hospice?
- Will you stay involved with my care even when I am no longer looking for treatment for my disease?

Although your doctor doesn't know exactly how you are going to respond to a treatment, it is important to make sure you have enough information to make an informed choice about what you want.