

Counseling for Patients

## Docs are Failing to Initiate End-of-Life Discussions

*Most physicians think these talks are important, but follow-through is low*



Though nearly all doctors agree they should talk with patients about their preferences for end-of-life care, most find it hard to start the conversation, and many aren't sure what to say, according to a nationwide poll. Some three-quarters of doctors and specialists believe the likelihood of these discussions is increased by Medicare's decision to begin reimbursing them \$86 for talking with patients about such things as hospice care, do-not-resuscitate orders and living wills. And three-quarters also say they should initiate the talk. But only 14 percent have billed Medicare for it.

Almost one-half of physicians said they are:

- Frequently or sometimes unsure of what to say.
- Concerned the patient might give up hope.
- Concerned the patient might feel the doctor was giving up on them.

Studies have indicated that patients increasingly want these discussions before facing a terminal illness. Some policy experts say end-of-life conversations save money on aggressive medical interventions that are not proven to prolong life – and that many patients and their families don't want.

The survey was commissioned by the John A. Hartford Foundation, the California Health Care Foundation and Cambia health Foundation.

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