

# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (SDOH): PATIENT-CENTERED CARE CONVERSATION GUIDE



## **ENGAGE: Start by building a relationship with your patient**

Create a welcoming and safe environment. Talk about SDoH and other concerns about barriers to health care at the middle or end of the visit, so that the patient has more time to get comfortable.

- Introduce yourself and your role.
- Ask for patient's permission to have a direct conversation about barriers to care
- Implement language-concordant care where necessary with a professional translator or patient advocate
- Acknowledge possible sensitivities around some questions and create an environment for patient to decline at any point.
- Allow some questions about SDoH to arise organically in conversation, such as: "Are you able to take time off work as you recover from this procedure?" "Do you have anyone at home who can help you?" or "Do you have transportation to get to your appointment in time?"
- Use a brief online or print SDoH questionnaire for patients who may be more comfortable with this format.
- Follow up by asking if the patient has any questions.

## **EMPATHIZE: Build understanding with your patient**

The goal of the conversation here is for the patient to feel that they are understood without biases and are respected.

- If you conduct an SDoH screening briefly summarize the results.
- Use open-ended questions to find out more about the patient's perspectives on their experience.

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- Use open-ended questions to ask patients about their interests, hobbies, and sources of enjoyment and meaning.
- Convey understanding through attentive non-verbal listening cues, including eye contact and body language as appropriate.
- Convey understanding through reflective listening.

## **SUPPORT: Focus on your patients' strengths**

Affirmations help to shift focus from the challenges patients face to the strengths they possess. Positive feedback builds patient empowerment and promotes self-efficacy and self-confidence.<sup>1</sup>

- Provide affirmations of the patient's strength and resilience.
- Empathy-based affirmations that respond to a specific characteristic or behavior are the most powerful.
- Acknowledge that structural discrimination and unconscious biases can worsen SDoH and that the patient is not to blame.

## **SUMMARIZE AND ACTION PLAN: End with empathy and collaboration**

Summaries communicate empathy and encourage collaboration. A good summary guarantees that patients and their families understand and approve of priorities in care and next steps.

- Summarize key points from the conversation. Check to see if you've missed anything that the patient considers a priority.
- Use open-ended questions to find out whether the patient wants referrals to other team members or community resources, if available and appropriate.
- Acknowledge that for areas where resources are not available, the primary care team will use this information to support care planning and health promotion in collaboration with the patient.
- If appropriate, ask the patient permission to follow up.

## **COLLABORATING WITH THE TEAM: Follow up with the primary care team and referral partners about patient priorities**

- Communicate with teammates regarding patient priorities to conduct effective warm handoffs, care coordination and seamless team approach to care.
- Initiate referral process, as needed.

1. Empathic Inquiry Learning Collaborative. Accessed October 7, 2022. Available at: <https://www.orca.org/files/11%20Empathic%20Inquiry%20Conversation%20Guide.pdf>