

**Responding to Difficult Questions Using VERS - Possible Script**  
**Developed by Elizabeth Causton MSW**

**Question:** “How much longer does my loved have to live?” “How much longer do I have to live?”

**Validate:** “You know, that’s a question we often get, even though it’s not an easy question to ask and not an easy question to answer. But it sounds like it’s an important question for you, so I will do my best to get you the information you need.”

**Explore:** “First of all, it would be helpful to understand a bit more about what’s behind this question for you. In other words, is there a specific concern that is causing you to ask this question now?”

[Their answer]

**Respond:** “OK so that is very helpful to know. Now, I’m just wondering if you have any sense of timing yourself? For example, have you noticed any changes in your (Dad’s) condition lately? And if so, do you have a sense of what those changes might mean?”

**Share:** “With your permission I would like to share our conversation with the team so that they can review your (Dad's) chart and respond to your questions and concerns. Is there anything else you would like me to pass on to them?”

“I also just want to let you know that because things can sometimes change more quickly than any of us can anticipate, we often tell people that if there are things that they feel they have to do or if there are people who need to visit, they might consider doing those things sooner rather than later.”

**Commentary:**

- **Validate** the question and offer to do your best (not to be 'right' or perfect).
- **Explore** the thinking behind the question to ensure that you are not making assumptions
- **Respond** by asking for the patient/ family member's opinion and expertise. This is an excellent opportunity to see where they are at, what they are noticing and how they are interpreting what they see. This will give the team member who responds to the question a better understanding of how the prognosis will be received, i.e. whether it will come as a surprise or if it will confirm what the person already believes to be true.
- **Share** the information you have gathered with the team in an effective and timely way. You may also share additional information with the patient/ family that will help them make decisions about what is important to them.