



TRANSFORMING SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATIONS



The University of Vermont
LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

THE
University of Vermont
HEALTH NETWORK

THE CONVERSATION GAP

When faced with serious illness, the vast majority of patients want to talk to their clinicians about what is most important to them. And when these conversations happen, patients are more likely to receive treatments that match their goals and priorities. Healthcare professionals agree: nearly 100% of clinicians studied in Vermont and nationally say they should be having serious illness conversations with patients.

Yet, there is a gap between how clinicians believe they should approach seriously ill patients and what they actually do. In Vermont, just 14% of clinicians report having serious illness conversations with patients.

Reasons clinicians cite for this “conversation gap” include lack of time, worry about provoking emotions, fear of prognostication, uncertainty about what to say, and lack of formal training.

The good news is all of these barriers can be overcome — that’s why we launched TalkVermont, that’s why it’s working, and that’s why we continue to grow the program.

**NEARLY 100% OF CLINICIANS SAY
THEY SHOULD BE HAVING GOALS
OF CARE CONVERSATIONS.**

ONLY 14% REPORT THAT THEY DO.

— Vermont Hospice Study, 2015

A man with a beard is shown in profile, looking out of a large window. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text is white and bold, positioned in the upper left and center of the image.

OUR VISION:

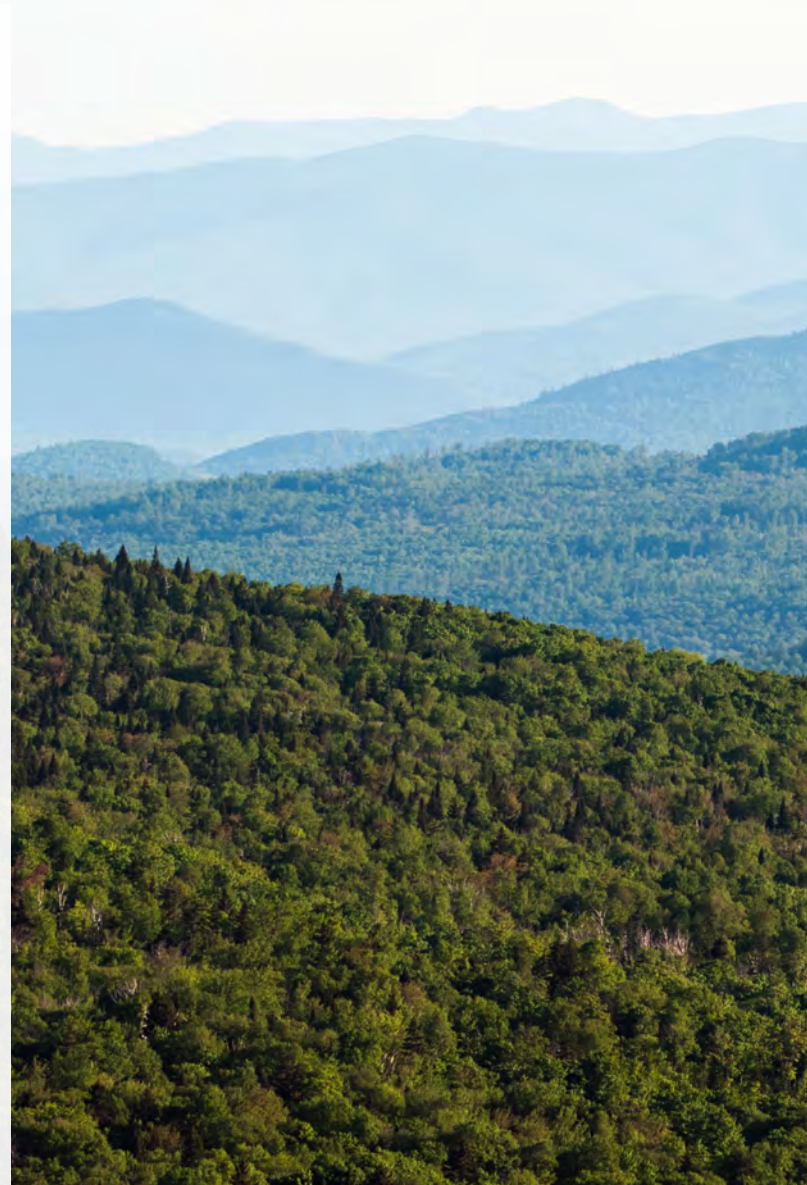
**EVERY SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENT IN
VERMONT WILL BE SURROUNDED BY
CLINICIANS WHO CAN SKILLFULLY
DISCUSS WHAT MATTERS MOST.**

TALKVERMONT MISSION

TRANSFORMING HOW WE CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENTS IN VERMONT

TalkVermont is a multi-component intervention to improve conversations between clinicians and seriously ill patients across the UVM Health Network. We use evidence-based methods to train clinicians in state-of-the-art serious illness communication and re-engineer the practice environment to support timely and effective communication.

We believe that empathic and honest conversations, focused on what matters most to a patient, are the cornerstones of patient- and family-centered care. Research demonstrates that patients who speak with their clinicians about their goals and values are more likely to receive the care they want, have fewer non-beneficial medical treatments, spend fewer days in hospitals and intensive care units, and report a better quality of life.





APPROACHES DEVELOPED WITH NATIONAL INNOVATORS

Communication Skills Coaching

We have collaborated with VitalTalk, the premier serious illness communication skills coaching program, to adapt their evidence-based trainings for our clinicians. We offer 8-hour training workshops that are engaging, interprofessional, and focused on eliciting patient values in the context of their illness.

System Re-engineering

We have partnered with Harvard University School of Public Health's Ariadne Labs to implement the Serious Illness Care Program (SICP). The SICP is a trial-proven, multi-component intervention for clinical practices that includes identifying target populations, prompting discussions, adapting scheduling and workflows to optimize conversation time, standardizing findable documentation in the electronic medical record, and systematic quality measurement and reporting.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is seated and gesturing with her right hand while speaking. In the background, there are whiteboards with handwritten notes in various colors. Visible text on the whiteboards includes "MAP OUT", "VALUES", "TELL", "HEADLINE", "ALIGN", "ASK", "CHECK IN", "PLAN", and several quotes related to cancer and infection. The overall scene suggests a professional training or educational environment.

SINCE 2018

29 COACHES

trained to teach courses

25 COURSES

taught since launch in March 2018

238 CLINICIANS

trained across the Network

262 STUDENTS

and residents trained

500 TOTAL

trained in serious illness conversations

99% RECOMMEND

the course to others

NETWORK-WIDE AND INTERPROFESSIONAL

CLINICIAN LOCATIONS

CLINICIANS TRAINED



Chaplains (4%)



Social Workers & Case Managers (14%)



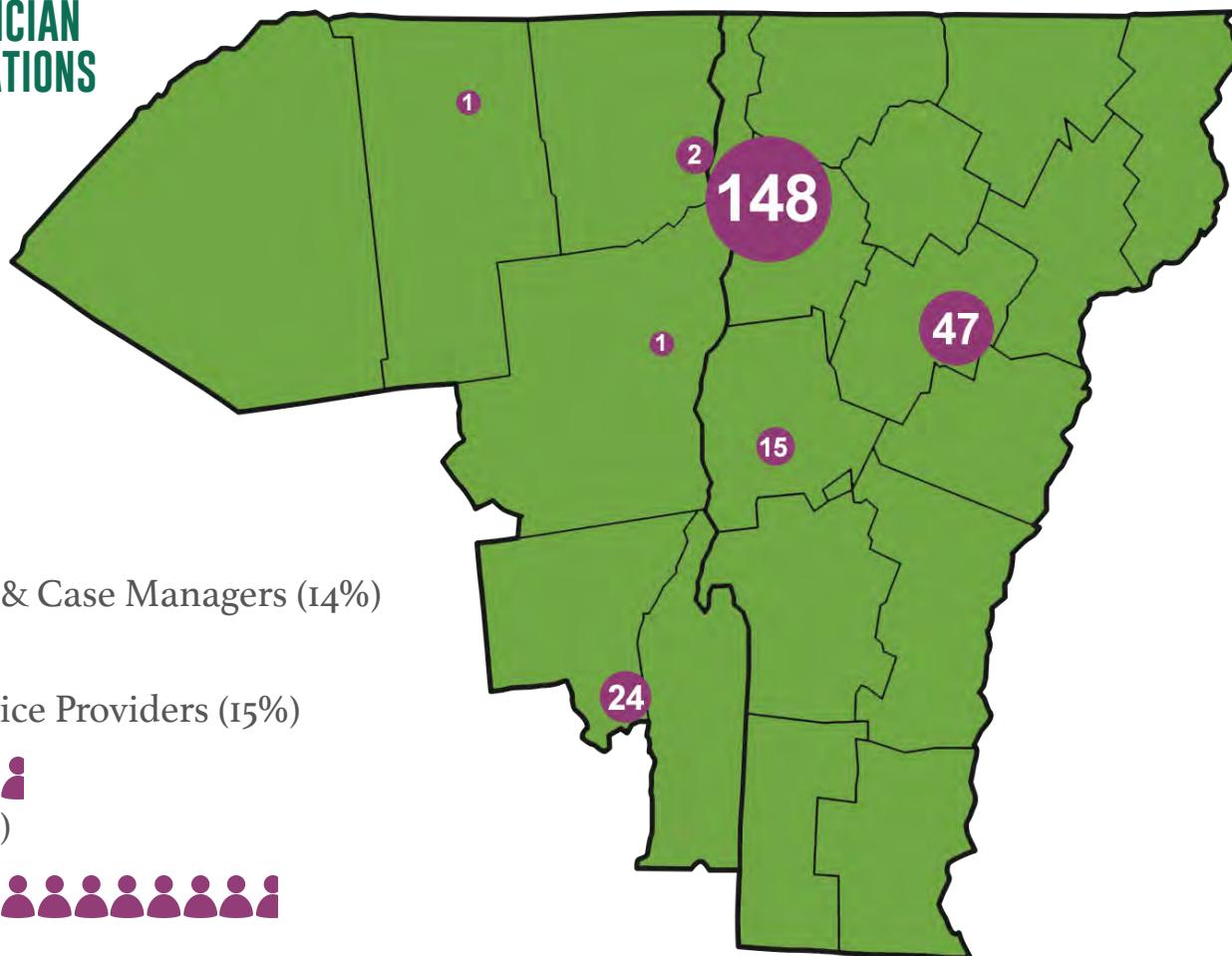
Advanced Practice Providers (15%)



Physicians (23%)



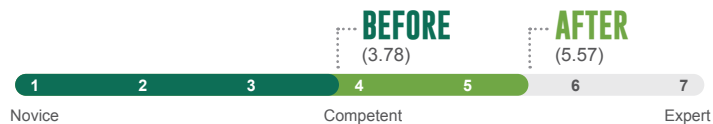
Nurses (44%)



COURSE IMPACT

IMMEDIATE INCREASE IN CLINICIAN CONFIDENCE*

Confidence Delivering Serious News



Q: How well prepared do you feel to deliver serious news to patients and their families?

Confidence With Patient-Centered Recommendations



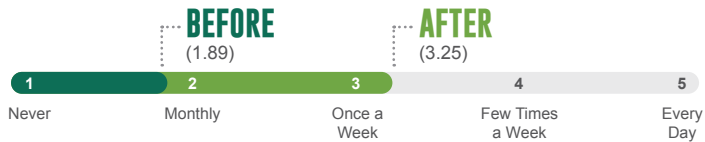
Q: How well prepared do you feel to make a recommendation based on patients' goals and priorities?



*230 clinicians surveyed before and immediately after courses, $p < .001$ for all values

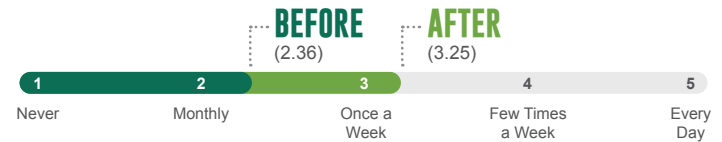
INCREASED USE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS AFTER SIX MONTHS**

Seeking Permission



Q: In the last month, how often have you asked permission to move a [serious illness] conversation forward?

Asking About Goals




Q: In the last month, how often have you asked a patient about their goals and values?

GREATER IMPACT WITH PATIENTS AFTER SIX MONTHS**

FROM 1.6
serious illness conversations per week

TO 2.4
serious illness conversations per week

** 58% completed a 6-month follow up survey, $p < .001$ for all values



92% OF COURSE PARTICIPANTS REPORTED AN INCREASE IN JOB SATISFACTION AS A RESULT OF A NEW SERIOUS ILLNESS CONVERSATION WITH PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

“

These workshops allow you to practice hard communication skills with an interdisciplinary group in a very vulnerable way. When you return to your team you have a new level of trust and respect for your colleagues.

— Pediatric Physician, UVMMC

I had the opportunity to attend one of these all-day workshops and it had a dramatic effect on how I interact with my patient population and truly improved the conversations I had with patients moving forward.

— Nurse Manager, UVMMC

This is the most useful workshop I have attended in 10 years.

— ED Nurse, UVMMC

I feel more confident, so I'm able to get to the point, gain insight, but still be sincere with my patients.

— Social Worker, UVM Home Health and Hospice

This training was a surprise practice changer for me, despite many years of experience.

— Primary Care Clinician, UVMMC

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OUR TEAM



Stephen Berns, MD FAAHPM
Director



Kacey Boyle, RN MSPC
Associate Director, Educational Programs



Anne Campbell
Program Manager

TALKVERMONT COACHES

Diana Barnard, MD (Porter Medical Center)
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Sharon Shannon, NP (Hudson Headwaters)
Iris Toedt-Pingel, MD (UVM Children's Hospital) *
John Wax, MD (UVMMC)

* member of curriculum committee

§ TalkVermont advisor

**100% OF PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED FELT
THEIR TALKVERMONT COACHES WERE
HELPFUL FOR LEARNING.**

CURRENT COURSES

MASTERING LATE GOALS OF CARE CONVERSATIONS

Focuses on strategies to compassionately communicate serious news with honesty and explore goals of care with patients during a medical crisis.

MASTERING EARLY GOALS OF CARE CONVERSATIONS

Focuses on communicating prognosis and discussing goals of care with patients who are in the early stages of their serious illness, often in the outpatient setting.

MASTERING GOALS OF CARE FOR PEDIATRIC POPULATIONS

Focuses on skills to deliver serious news and explore goals for pediatric patients and their families. The initial courses are currently funded by the Frymoyer Scholars Program.



FUTURE COURSES

TELECOACHING RURAL HEALTH CLINICIAN CHAMPIONS

Consolidates skills taught in previous courses through weekly video-conferences, discussions on clinical workflows, and deliberate practice in real clinical environments. The inaugural coaching program has been funded by the Cambia Health Foundation.

ADVANCED GOALS OF CARE CONVERSATIONS

Focuses on higher skills for serious illness conversations including how to negotiate conflicting goals of care, navigate care meetings with multiple family members, and overcome challenging team dynamics.

All courses utilize small-group learning that features cognitive mapping, deliberate practice with simulated patients, and just-in-time feedback.

“

I would love to see more of this training throughout the state — for all specialists!

”

— Hospitalist, CVMC

WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the next few years, we aim to expand TalkVermont by:

- increasing courses across the Network, specifically targeting primary care, hospital medicine, oncology and cardiology;
- improving coaching programs to build skills after course completion;
- adding trainings for clinical champions across sites; and
- enhancing the electronic health record to capture the conversations.

Our goal is to train 800 clinicians by 2023, ensuring that even more Vermonters are surrounded by healthcare teams able to match a care plan to their values.

TALK WITH US

If you would like more information about our work, please reach out to:

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national partners

