

# ACT to Implement the Serious Illness Conversation Guide

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## OVERVIEW

**OBJECTIVE:** Demonstrate how a large, multi-state health system is enhancing the quality and consistency of goals of care (GOC) conversations.

**BACKGROUND:** Providence St. Joseph Health (PSJH), through the Institute for Human Caring, is advancing a non-incremental strategy to foster care for the whole person, including targeted efforts to educate all clinicians to have goals of care conversations. A fundamental value of care for the whole person is shared decision making to align treatment with each patient's personal values, preferences, and priorities.

An Advanced Communication Training (ACT) course was developed using the Serious Illness Conversation Guide (SICG) as a tool to build skills among non-palliative care physicians, nurses, social workers, and chaplains.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many clinicians have not received adequate training around communication with seriously ill patients. GOC conversations that generate a personalized care plan for patients living with serious illness do not consistently occur and have been difficult to locate in patients' EHR. It is common for patients with advanced, life-limiting conditions to undergo burdensome procedures and prolonged life-sustaining treatments without achievable goals that are clearly defined or discussed.

## METHODS

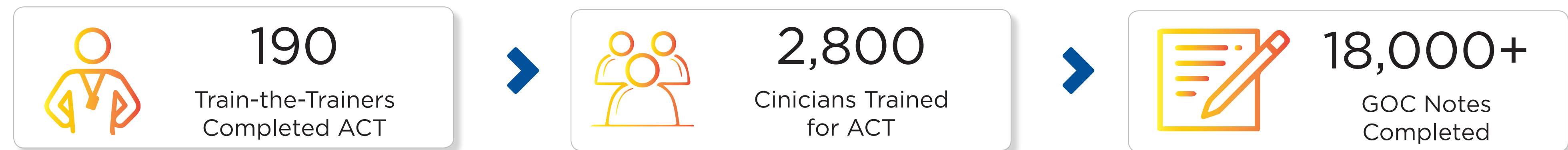
The Advance Communication Training (ACT) course was designed to build skills of practicing physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers and chaplains. The course combines didactic-style lecture, video-based learning, and role play. Rotating role play, rather than utilization of formalized standardized patients, is employed and allows for a more affordable and scalable process in our 7 state health system with 52 acute care facilities. ACT courses are a key element of an integrated, multicomponent approach to changing practice patterns and creating a culture of whole person caring.

### IMPLEMENTATION ROLLOUT ACROSS PSJH ALSO INCLUDES:

1. Optimized clinician documentation modules for easy documentation of GOC conversations in the EHR
2. Ongoing access to implementation project management and consultation support, and
3. Data displayed on dynamic internal dashboards to drive performance

## RESULTS

Participating hospitals with clinicians who completed the course saw sustained results in documenting GOC discussions when they committed to ongoing, mandated trainings for all staff. From 2015-2018, 190 trainers and 2,800 caregivers were trained in ACT leading to more than 18,000 documented GOC conversations in our EHR. A survey of clinicians showed most found the ACT experience beneficial.



### KEY LEARNINGS:

- **Cost-effectiveness:** Less costly to implement a train-the-trainer model to scale across hospital setting than to hire external trainers to deliver individual training sessions
- **Consistency in delivering a training curriculum:** The train-the-trainer model allows for standardizing disseminated content
- **Acceptance of internal trainers:** Clinicians are more receptive to education provided by peers and more readily seek advice from their fellow clinicians
- **Enhanced training follow-up:** Investing in development of in-house experts increases the likelihood that the new concepts become part of the clinicians' routine care
- **Tailored learning:** Fellow trainers have the advantage of understanding the environment and culture of the organization, allowing them to tailor the answers and current practices of the training participants

## CONCLUSION

Advance Communication Training sessions are associated with substantial increases in documented GOC conversations with seriously ill patients. Interactive education based on the Serious Illness Conversation Guide is a scalable model for building communication skills of non-palliative care clinicians in practice. Our curriculum and ACT model can be exported to health systems committed to measurably improving goal-aligned care for patients with life-threatening conditions.

