

CLINICAL SKILLS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICINE

BREAKING BAD NEWS

Importance

Breaking bad news is an unfortunate but common duty for doctors who work in Emergency Departments. If properly prepared for, competently approached and sensitively handled the impact of the news can be managed such that the inevitable unhappiness is made no worse.

Key skill

By the end of this session, you should be *confident* and *competent* in the following:

Breaking Bad News	How to structure the interview	Selecting the location and setting of the interview
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Procedure routine:

1. Prepare beforehand	Establish the appropriate location Ensure privacy and freedom from interruptions (bleep, phone) Engage other members of the team as appropriate Have all medical information to hand
2. Establish awareness	Determine what the patient / relative knows or suspects Give warning that the situation is serious
3. Offer information at the patient / relatives pace	Be clear and unambiguous Check for understanding at all stages Proceed at the patient's / relatives' pace Cover the relevant topic, diagnosis, treatment, prognosis and support Do not give more information than can be absorbed Identify and acknowledge reaction
4. Allow space	Accept that the recipient may be shocked by the news Allow news to be absorbed before giving further information
5. Handle reactions	Expect and manage typical reactions which include anger, guilt / blame, fear / anxiety, tears, sadness and the need to escape
6. Discuss next steps	Respect the cultural and religious wishes of the family and patient when possible Identify concerns and handle difficult questions Clarify course of action including any handover of care Provide support by giving a contact person and number
7. Know the law	Organ donation Death certification and compulsory inquests
8. Support staff	Provide support and assistance for staff after difficult encounters