Breaking Bad News

A. Advance preparation. Arrange adequate time, privacy, with no interuptions (pager off); review clinical info; mentally rehearse; prepare self emotionally.

B. Build a therapeutic environment/relationship. Determine what and how much pt wants to know; family or support present; introduce self to everyone; warn pt bad news is coming; touch when appropriate; schedule F/U.

C. Communicate well. Ask what pt and family already know; be frank but compassionate; avoid jargon/euphemisms; allow for silence and tears, proceed at pt's pace, have pt describe his understanding of the news, repeat at later visits; allow time for questions; give written info; conclude with summary and F/U plan.

D. Deal with pt and family rxns. Assess and respond to their emotional rxn; repeat each visit; be empathetic; do not argue or criticize colleagues.

E. Encourage and validate emotions. Explore what the news means to pt; offer realistic hope; use interdisciplinary resources; take care of own needs and those of involved staff/housestaff

Adapted from Vandekieft, AFP 64:1975;Dec 15, 01.

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