

The importance of effective communication when breaking bad news to families of children and young people with cancer

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INTRODUCTION

Breaking bad news in nursing refers to the process of informing families of children and young people about a serious diagnoses, or other difficult news related to their health condition. This can include delivering news such as a cancer diagnosis, treatment failure as well as managing other circumstances. This presentation will cover the importance of breaking bad news to families of children and young people with cancer. Effective communication is crucial in breaking bad news as it reduces anxiety and fear by providing clear and accurate information about the treatment plan. Breaking bad news is also fundamental in nursing as it ensures that children and their families are emotionally supported, well informed and empowered to make decisions about their care. According to the nursing standard breaking bad news 'refers to any bad, sad or difficult information that alters patient's perceptions of their present or future' (Warnock, 2014)

It is suggested that providing emotional support allows children and families to have healthy coping mechanisms, through the use of effective communication. Allowing families to feel as though their in control of their childs care (Yang et al., 2022).

AIMS & RATIONALES

- To improve the level of communication related to members in healthcare and patients/parents
- How changes in environment can internally effect how breaking bad news is accepted, introducing and implementing a change in which settings is best suited for patients when breaking bad news.

ROLE OF THE NURSE :

Nurses and members of the MDT team can provide emotional support to families and children during this process. For example, by listening to patient concerns and comforting them through this. The nursing team can coordinate care and ensure that the appropriate medical and supportive services can be used and provided for the family. Ongoing support is necessary for effectively communicating with families and children throughout this entire treatment and recovery process. Advocating for the family is significant as this allows for the families needs to be met, ensuring that their values and beliefs are taken into consideration and prioritised.

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) states that 'the nursing role is central in providing support for families when giving or reinforcing information delivery, the role of the nurse is multifaceted... including that of a facilitator, supporter, counsellor, educator, and advocate for the child and family' (Royal College of Nursing, 2013).

BACKGROUND:

Effective communication is necessary to ensure that breaking bad news is done in a polite and sympathetic manner, this is a crucial aspect of oncology care. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) - emphasises how compassionate care and communication is significant, as involving families with decision making and providing effective care allows families to be supported through this difficult time. NCCN suggests that 'patient advocacy groups helps patients, their families and their caregivers navigate the cancer landscape, ensuring patients receive appropriate and timely care, education and assistance' (National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2023). Bad news should be delivered when it is convenient for the patient without interruptions, with ample time. One way in which nurses introduce effective communication is through 'patient centred care' which is an approach that emphasises the importance of patient's preferences, values and beliefs. This is a key component as it helps to ensure that families are informed and well involved in the decision making process.

Importance of professionalism and interpersonal skills when relating to breaking bad news is imperative, however this can be subjective and difficult to do. Therefore a rapport should be built for patients and families, as this allows nurses and other members of the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to be better equipped to manage emotions and provide emotional support. Physical and social settings of where breaking bad news is occurring in is just as important, this is because the location of this conversation should be private, confidential and comfortable for all parties involved (Monden et al., 2016).

S – SETTING up the interview

P – Assessing the patient's PERCEPTION

I – Obtaining the patient's INVITATION

K - Giving KNOWLEDGE and information to the patient

E - Addressing the patient's EMOTIONS with empathic responses

S – STRATEGY and SUMMARY

ABCDE
A- Advance Preparation
B- Build environment/relationship
C- Communicate well
D- Deal with reactions
E- Encourage & validate emotions



BENEFITS

- Improved understanding, can allow family members and children to understand the nature of an illness, the prognosis as well as treatment options (Dr Jacqueline Payne, 2014).
- Increased trust amongst nurses and patients.
- Establishing a partnerships allows families to feel supported.
- Families feeling empowered due to active participation in their child's care, resulting in an enhanced quality of life.

CHALLENGES

- If there is an information overload, family members may struggle to understand the complex medical care of the child, leading to misunderstandings (Carlsson et al., 2019).
- Language and culture barriers can be challenging if family members health literacy is limited (Seth, 2010).
- Difficulties giving accurate prognosis or timeline.
- Additional stress due to uncertainty can be a major challenge within effectively communicating to young people and families regarding cancer (Brand et al., 2017).

KEY POINTS

- Unable to always control environment.
- Child's needs should be advocated for even if conflict occurs within families.
- Support system and stable foundation is necessary to ensure parents feel secure and safe, ensuring that their child's care is always prioritised and advocated for (Narayanan et al., 2010).

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