E MOTIONS

M EETING

P ATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

A DEQUATE LANGUAGE

T RUTH

H OPE

Y ES for PATIENT'S EMPOWERMENT

EMOTIONS - patient's and doctor's. Deep emotional context remains an inherent element of breaking bad news. The context includes both the patient's and the doctor's emotions. News of a serious illness is usually perceived by the patient as hostile. The doctor who breaks the news of a serious threat to health or life also experiences many negative emotions. Before a discussion with your patient you should spend a couple of minutes on preparing a plan, including the scope and sequence of communication of the information to the patient. The formulation of a plan involves a thorough understanding of the detailed diagnosis, the course of the illness to date, its current stage, the plans for treatment, and the prognosis.

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MEETING - it is necessary to find an appropriate, quiet place which would make it possible for the patient and doctor to remain seated during the discussion, without interference by third parties.
The time should be spent only on the discussion. The doctor should not take any phone calls or solve any other problems during the discussion.
It is up to the patient to decide whether he wants to be with the doctor on his own during a discussion or accompanied by another person to support him, e.g. his spouse. Where a discussion relates to children, it is of key importance for both parents to be present. Whereas, it is up to the parents and the doctor to decide whether the child itself should be present, guided by the patient's wishes, age and emotional maturity.

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PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE. Prior to delivering the news, you should ask the patient for an assessment of his condition and about his concerns. This will make it possible for you to assess the patient's understanding and attitude. By listening to the patient, you may avoid discussing the facts which are clear to the patient, adjust the form and language of the discussion to the patient's needs and his readiness to accept the information, and get to know the patient's perspective. During the statement of his opinion, the patient communicates a lot of information to the doctor non-verbally, therefore it is of particular importance to maintain eye contact with the patient.

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ADEQUATE LANGUAGE.

While communicating the information, you should use your best efforts to adapt your language and make it comprehensible to the patient. It is important to avoid medical jargon.

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TRUTH and **H**OPE. The news should be communicated straightforwardly and in the simplest way possible. Right before breaking bad news, it is worthwhile to say the so called warning sentence enabling the patient to raise his guard. Examples: "I wish the news were better" or "I'm sorry I can't have better news for you". You should resist the temptation to comfort the patient immediately after breaking the news. A moment of silence is perceived by patients as a sign of respect for them.

The next stage of the discussion is to assure the patient of continued care and constant readiness to support him, present a plan for treatment, details of the prognosis, and answer his questions.

Due to the stress, the patient is usually only able to remember about 40 per cent of the information communicated thereto during the discussion. For that reason, it is a good idea to propose a specific date for another discussion with the patient so that he may receive answers to his questions. The period between the two discussions will enable the patient to formulate his concerns more clearly. A suggestion for the patient to write his questions down is a good idea. A plan like this makes it possible for the patient to avoid the feeling that he has insufficient knowledge and to avoid repeated unsatisfactory discussions. You should avoid the following expressions during a discussion with the patient: "there's nothing we can do" or "there is no hope". It is important to tell the truth without taking away hope, regardless of the patient's medical condition. In some cases, that would be hope for a period without pain, enabling the patient to make some of his dreams come true, or for a treatment which is not crippling, and in some other cases, for a complete recovery.

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YES for PATIENT'S EMPOWERMENT. It is necessary to accept the patient's reaction, without judging or putting pressure on him, provide emotional support to the patient, and involve the patient in taking medical decisions. The patient's empowerment is a process which enables the patient to regain control over his life, take the initiative, and make decisions.

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