

Communication Strategies for Breaking Bad News

Communicating bad news to patients is one of the most difficult tasks for healthcare providers. In addition to the verbal component, it requires the ability to recognize and respond to the patient’s emotions, deal with the stress that the bad news creates, and still be able to involve the patient in decisions.

Below are a sampling of frameworks that have been developed to provide structure to the process of communicating bad news.

SPIKES Protocol For Breaking Bad News
<p>S – SETTING and LISTENING SKILLS</p> <p>P – Patient’s PERCEPTION of the condition and its seriousness</p> <p>I – INVITATION from patient to give information</p> <p>K – KNOWLEDGE – giving medical facts</p> <p>E – Explore EMOTIONS and EMPATHIZE as patient responds</p> <p>S – STRATEGY and SUMMARY</p>
<p>Adapted from Baile WF, Buckman R, Lenzi R, Glober G, Beale EA, Kudelka AP. SPIKES-A six-step protocol for delivering bad news: application to the patient with cancer. <i>The Oncologist</i>. 2000;5(4):302–11.⁴⁵</p>

ABCDE Mnemonic for Breaking Bad News
<p>Advance preparation</p> <p>Build a therapeutic environment/relationship</p> <p>Communicate well</p> <p>Deal with patient and family reactions</p> <p>Encourage and validate emotions</p>
<p>Adapted from VandeKieft GK. Breaking bad news. <i>Am Fam Physician</i>. 2001 Dec 15;64(12):1975–8.⁴⁶</p>

Kaye’s 10 Step Model to Breaking Bad News	
Step 1	Preparation
Step 2	What does the patient know?
Step 3	Is more information wanted?
Step 4	Give a warning shot
Step 5	Allow denial
Step 6	Explain if requested
Step 7	Listen to concerns
Step 8	Encourage ventilation of feelings
Step 9	Summarize
Step 10	Offer further help
<p>Adapted from Kaye P. <i>Breaking Bad News: A 10 Step Approach</i>. Northhampton, Australia: EPL Publications; 1996.⁴⁷</p>	

For more information, please refer to the complete report by visiting our website:
<http://www.pcmch.on.ca>



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