

Giving Bad News

Plan ahead

- 1) Know full patient story and that information about the subject is complete and accurate
- 2) Observe one's own understandable reactions to the situation
- 3) Be sure others who need to be present are present
- 4) Rehearse, especially in light of what one knows about the patient's style

Arrange meeting personally and be sure enough time is available

Ensure safe, comfortable setting

Ensure patient's readiness to hear the information and level of understanding of the situation

Give the bad news clearly and succinctly

- 1) Give one bit of information at a time
- 2) Encourage questions; give direct answers
- 3) Encourage emotional expression
- 4) Convey hope but do not falsely reassure
- 5) Do not rush the patient and be comfortable with silence
- 6) Accept that there may be nothing medically to do but being with the patient is supportive
- 7) Encourage follow-up questions and check patient's understanding
- 8) Provide necessary additional information
- 9) Explore impact on patient's life and the implications of the bad news
- 10) Ascertain that patient has not become suicidal

Develop a plan

- 1) Ensure support system for the specific individual's needs
- 2) Inform others, as appropriate to the patient's wishes
- 3) Make explicit follow-up visit and/or telephone contact; give home phone number
- 4) Initiate follow-up if patient does not
- 5) Make appropriate diagnostic and treatment considerations

Use emotion-seeking and handling skills throughout