ABSTRACT
Over the last few decades the health care has tremendously improved thanks to continuous advancements in the medical field. Besides latest technologies, new therapeutic agents, biomedical research, improving prognoses and sophisticated surgical techniques, the art of practicing medicine itself has also changed in a positive way. Due to latest information technology, the patients and their carers of current era are more knowledgeable about various health problems and the ways these can be managed effectively. This has resulted in high expectations from doctors which occasionally may not be realistic. These factors have increased the responsibilities of modern time doctors. In addition to the need for being up to date with the latest medical developments, they also need to focus and improve skills which are vitally important in patient care such as effective communication, ensuring continuity of care and managing patients through team approach. There is a desperate need to improve these skills for three main reasons; to improve quality of care, to build public confidence in doctors and most importantly to reduce the increasing number of complaints against doctors.

KEY WORDS: Quality of Health Care (MeSH), Quality Improvement (MeSH), Delivery of Health Care (MeSH), Health Communication (MeSH), Patient Care (MeSH), Continuity of Patient Care (MeSH).

IMPROVING PATIENT CARE AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN DOCTORS: ROLE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN PATIENT CARE

Intisar Ulhaq

TABLE 1: THE ABCDE MNEMONIC FOR BREAKING BAD NEWS

**Advance preparation**
- Arrange for adequate time, privacy and no interruptions (turn pager off or to silent mode).
- Review relevant clinical information.
- Mentally rehearse, identify words or phrases to use and avoid.
- Prepare yourself emotionally.

**Build a therapeutic environment/relationship**
- Determine what and how much the patient wants to know.
- Have family or support persons present.
- Introduce yourself to everyone.
- Warn the patient that bad news is coming.
- Use touch when appropriate.
- Schedule follow-up appointments.

**Communicate well**
- Ask what the patient or family already knows.
- Be frank but compassionate; avoid euphemisms and medical jargon.
- Allow for silence and tears; proceed at the patient’s pace.
- Have the patient describe his or her understanding of the news; repeat this information at subsequent visits.
- Allow time to answer questions; write things down and provide written information.
- Conclude each visit with a summary and follow-up plan.

**Deal with patient and family reactions**
- Assess and respond to the patient and the family’s emotional reaction; repeat at each visit.
- Be empathetic.
- Do not argue with or criticize colleagues.

**Encourage and validate emotions**
- Explore what the news means to the patient.
- Offer realistic hope according to the patient’s goals.
- Use interdisciplinary resources.
- Take care of your own needs; be attuned to the needs of involved house staff and office or hospital personnel.

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Another area where effective communication can make a huge difference in clinical practice is breaking bad news to patients and their carers. By adopting a structured approach in these circumstances helps the patients and families to cope well with their diagnosis and be compliant with the management offered. It becomes even more important when talking about life limiting conditions and palliative care. Communicating bad news is not always easy and even an expert professional may find it distressing to break such news. Health professionals need continuous support and training to achieve the skills required in such sensitive matters. The way a bad news is broken may be variable depending upon the clinical scenario, social dynamics and cultural values. However, every member of the medical and nursing team should have an insight into the sensitivities of this matter. In addition to doctors, nursing staff should also be involved in the process of training as well as breaking bad news since they are an integral part of medical team and more often than not patients and their families develop a strong bond with them owing to their caring nature. Breaking bad news in its own right is vast topic which needs detailed discussion. However a useful approach which may be helpful in this context is summarised in Table 1.

The role of communication in continuity of patient care cannot be emphasised enough. In modern medicine multiple health professionals and various health agencies are involved in patient care. The treatment settings continuously change. A patient’s journey from primary care to hospital and from ambulatory care to
nursing home, the only way to maintain a continuity of care is through effective communication among all the professionals involved.\(^7\) Whilst transferring patients from one facility to another, if a systematic approach is not adopted with regards to communication, the patient’s care may be jeopardised due to break in continuity of care.\(^8\)

In situations where a patient is transferred from one hospital to another, various professionals are involved in the process. Doctors, nurses, paramedics and ambulance crew all have shared responsibility to minimise the risks to patient’s health by following a timely and systemic communication approach for sharing the patient information.

Finally, communication may be improved by working in teams, regular training, developing various communication tools and strategies according to local needs and regularly auditing existing communication models.

REFERENCES


CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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IU is the sole author of this article with regards to topic selection, literature review, manuscript writing and collating references. Author agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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