

Experiment: 02

Practical: Breaking Bad News in a Clinical Setting

1. Objective

To develop effective communication skills for delivering bad news to patients and their families with empathy, sensitivity, honesty, and professionalism in a clinical setting.

2. Reference:

3. Requirements

1. Role-play scenario or clinical case study
2. Two or more participants acting as a healthcare professional and a patient or relative
3. Case details containing an adverse diagnosis or serious medical condition
4. Observation and evaluation checklist
5. Pen and notebook for recording observations and feedback

4. Theory

Breaking bad news refers to communicating information about a serious diagnosis, an unfavorable prognosis, treatment failure, or other distressing medical circumstances to a patient or their family.

Delivering bad news is an essential communication skill for healthcare professionals, including pharmacists, doctors, and nurses. Poor communication may cause anxiety, confusion, loss of trust, and emotional distress. Therefore, bad news should be delivered in a compassionate, clear, honest, and patient-centred manner.

The SPIKES protocol is a widely used six-step framework for communicating bad news.

1. **S – Setting up:** Ensure privacy, minimize interruptions, and provide adequate time for discussion.
2. **P – Perception:** Assess what the patient already knows or understands about their condition.
3. **I – Invitation:** Ask how much information the patient wishes to receive.
4. **K – Knowledge:** Explain the medical information clearly, using simple language and avoiding unnecessary medical jargon.
5. **E – Emotions and Empathy:** Recognize the patient's emotional response, listen patiently, and express empathy.
6. **S – Strategy and Summary:** Explain the next steps, available treatment options, support services, and follow-up arrangements.

Healthcare professionals should maintain confidentiality, respect patient autonomy, avoid giving false reassurance, and allow patients sufficient time to process the information.

5. Procedure

1. Select a clinical case involving a serious diagnosis, an unfavorable prognosis, or treatment failure.
2. Assign roles to participants, such as healthcare professional, patient, and observer.
3. Arrange a private and comfortable setting for the role-play.

4. Begin the conversation by introducing yourself and establishing rapport with the patient.
5. Assess the patient's understanding of the illness and determine how much information they wish to receive.
6. Deliver the bad news gradually, clearly, and honestly, using simple and sensitive language.
7. Pause to allow the patient to respond emotionally and acknowledge their feelings with empathy.
8. Listen actively to the patient's concerns and answer questions within the limits of your professional knowledge.
9. Discuss the next steps, including treatment options, supportive care, referrals, and follow-up.
10. Summarize the discussion and confirm the patient's understanding.
11. Ask the observer to evaluate the communication skills, empathy, clarity, confidentiality, and professionalism demonstrated during the activity.
12. Conduct a feedback session to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

6. Result

The practical was performed through role-play to understand and practice the systematic and empathetic delivery of bad news in a clinical setting. The participant developed skills in effective communication, active listening, emotional support, patient-centred counselling, and professional handling of sensitive clinical information.