

# BREAKING BAD NEWS

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Dr. Seema Mehrotra  
Additional Professor of Clinical Psychology  
NIMHANS, Bangalore

# WHAT IS BAD NEWS?

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# Bad News

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Any news that drastically & negatively alters the patient's view of his/her future.

■ **Buckman (1984)**

# Breaking Bad News

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- Why is it difficult?

# Sources of Difficulty.....

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- Discomfort with negative emotions
- Messenger of bad news... causing hurt, taking away hope ?
- Perceived lack of skills in handling awkward questions
- Feeling not- equipped to manage the emotional impact on self and others

# Breaking Bad News

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- Best Strategy ?

# Breaking Bad new

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## **Changing trends.....**

- Non disclosure
- Full disclosure
- Individualistic disclosure

# GOALS?

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# Goals : Breaking Bad news

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- To determine the patient's knowledge and expectations and readiness to hear the bad news
- **To provide important information** in accordance with needs and patient's preferences
  - To provide support & assistance to reduce the emotional impact of the news
- To jointly develop a strategy in the form of an action-plan

# Breaking Bad News :

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■ STEPS?

# Breaking Bad News: Steps

- Getting the ***Setting*** right / preparation **S**
- Find out what the patient knows (***Perceives***) **P**
- Find out what the patient wants to know  
(Obtain ***Invitation***) **I**
- Giving information (***Knowledge***) **K**
- Responding to ***Emotions*** **E**
- ***Summary*** & ***Strategy*** : Closing **S**
  - (support, planning, follow up)

(Not necessarily a single point event)

# Points to remember.....

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- ❑ Bad news : Has objective & subjective dimensions
  - ❑ Do not assume what is known
  - ❑ Full information vs. right information
- ❑ Explore preferences– ?presence of a significant other/family member

# Points to remember.....

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- Identify concerns
- Explore resources
- Small bits–pause–check (Ask–tell–ask)
- Pace/language–individualize  
(Clarity and appropriateness)

# Encourage to ask rather than only tell

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- Encourage : There are no stupid questions
- Empathize with distress regarding uncertainty (e.g. wish statement)
- Preferences for quantitative information varied
- Respect need to maintain some ambiguity about future & need to hope

Do not just acknowledge a fact  
Address the associated emotions...

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## Acknowledging emotions

Purposes served: – Signals given:

- You are allowed to feel this
- I can somewhat understand
- We can discuss

# Points to remember.....

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- Convey respect  
(where, how, who)
- Honesty.... I don't know
- False reassurance X
- Sensitivity to family-centered decision making

# Points to remember.....

## Dealing with family's resistance :

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- Explore reasons for keeping secret...
- Emotional and other costs of withholding information
- Negotiate access to patient to check understanding of situation by the patient
- Address concerns: optimum information and support following disclosure

# Points to remember.....

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- Explain options
- Check understanding
- Offer to make recommendations & assistance
- Discuss dilemmas and concerns
- Discuss time-frame for decisions
- Repeat information- critical for decision making, check
- Arrange support & review

# Points to remember...

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- Monitor one's own feelings and behaviors
  - Discussion with others in the team:  
support, feedback & preparation

Learning through practice and through  
observations

Collaborate.. collaborate.. collaborate..

# Points to remember....

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What is most valued  
by the clients in the process:

**Clarity**

**Competence**

**Caring attitude**

(Knowledge, skills, attitude)

# THINGS GO WRONG WHEN

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## WE TRY TO ESCAPE BY.....

- Inappropriate Delegation
- No Effort to Validate Distress
- Focus on facts alone– Intellectualization
- Minimization & empty reassurance

# THINGS GO WRONG WHEN:

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## WE REACT IN ANGER TO

- To Denial
- To Idolization
- To Rehearsal of the Story
- To 'Unreasonable' Demands
- To Anger & Blame

# Breaking Bad news

## Point to Ponder....

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- *What NEEDS to be discussed*
- *What MIGHT be discussed*
- *What SHOULD be discussed*
- *What OUGHT to be kept silent*

.....are *Issues that require negotiation*  
- *(Kutner, 1991)*

# No time.....?

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- Being aware of the ideal- helps to move closer towards it
- Like any other skill-efficiency improves with practice
- Collaboration
- Integration with an overall approach to communication ( not a single-point event)



Thank you!