

Giving Serious News and Prognostication

Skills for addressing family knowledge

As with any medical procedure, giving serious news requires a coherent strategy in order for it to be accomplished successfully. In this case, the strategy encompasses a series of distinct communication steps.

ASK-TELL-ASK (TELL-ASK-TELL-ASK.....keep checking in after telling!)

ASK

“What have you been told about [the patient’s] condition?”

“Is there anyone else who should be here for the discussion?”

“Would it be ok if I shared what I know with you?”

“Would it be helpful to talk about what to expect as your illness progresses?”

“Would it be helpful to talk about how much time you may have?” (prognosis)

TELL

Small Chunks of information (less than three)

Avoid medical jargon

Big picture message

“The CT Scan they did to see why you were coughing blood showed a cancer”

Acknowledging uncertainty when talking about prognosis

“Some people do better than this and some people do not as well.”

ASK

“ Before I move on, do you have any questions so far?”

“What concerns do you have about what I said?”

“Can you summarize the main points that we discussed?”

“To make sure we are the same page, tell me what you are going to tell your wife?”