

Clear conversations: conversing clearly, efficiently and with empathy.

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This course discusses the implementation of a program which teaches effective communication skills to express empathy while delivering bad news. This course outlines how the program works, specific adult learning techniques that make this program successful, and how it was implemented at our institution. We discuss the challenges of delivering bad news and how effective communication skills can make delivering bad news less challenging. We discuss the elements of this communications program and provide insight into challenges and opportunities when starting and facilitating a communications program.

Course Objectives:

Objective 1 – Describe the components of the CLEAR conversations program

Objective 2 – Review the learning techniques which are known to succeed in adult learning

Objective 3 – Explore the challenges and opportunities in implementing a communications program

Benefits of skilled communication when delivering serious news include:

- Higher patient satisfaction

- Greater patient adherence to treatment

- Better patient health outcomes

- Fewer physician malpractice claims

- Reduced patient anxiety

- Increased recall

- Improved understanding

Age and experience do not guarantee skilled communication, and communications training is felt to be beneficial by residency programs.

The best approach to teaching these skills is a combination of teaching in simulation followed by use in the clinical arena.

At Henry Ford Hospital, we have employed a program called CLEAR conversations

This program teaches conversation skills for delivering serious news.

Three primary tasks to be accomplished during these conversations are:

Establishing connection

Eliciting values, goals, and preferences

Delivering information

Using a lecture followed by a small group session format, learners recognize and develop responses to emotional cues and statements that might arise during the conversation. This includes developing responses to difficult questions. They also learn how to demonstrate empathy during these encounters.

Learners practice the skills they are taught in a simulation to map out the patient's goals of care in order to create a plan of care.

The conversation goes as follows:

Reframe the big picture

Expect emotion and empathize

Map what is important to the patient

Align with the patient's values

Plan treatments to match values

The skills to respond to emotion include the following:

Name the emotion – “This is overwhelming news”

Understanding – “I can only imagine what you are going through.”

“This is an overwhelming situation.”

Respect – “You did the right thing coming to the ED today.”

“You are doing a great job managing a difficult illness.”

Support – I will continue to work with you to figure out the next steps.”

“I wish I had better news”

Explore – “Tell me more about what worries you”