

# Communication with the patient at the end of his life

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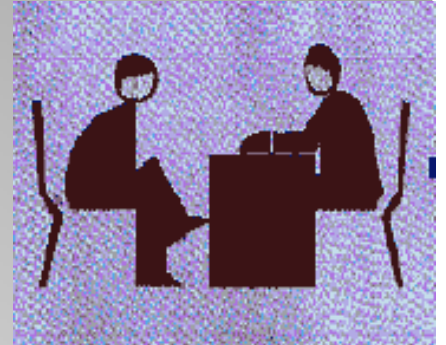
„ATA“:

- A - ask
- T - tell
- A - ask

# Breaking bad news



# „Bad news“



- Any information that seriously and adversely changes a person's view of his future.
- A measure of the badness: the gap between a person's expectations of the situation and the actual medical realities

## 3 phases

- Preparation
- Breaking „bad news“
- „Debriefing“

# I phase

- Who will do it
- My own emotions
- Meeting with the team
- Planning the sessions...
- Privacy

## SPIKES protocol – breaking bad news

<b>S</b>	Setting & Starting	Physical – position of body (level with patient, lower if the patient is angry), body language and eye contact (avoid when situation is "hot") Listening Skills – use of silence and pauses, use of patient's own language as a bridge; appropriate use of touch.
<b>P</b>	Perception	Assess the perception of the current situation. Note different ways of asking; note patient's vocabulary and comprehension; also note denial if present...
<b>I</b>	Invitation	Aim to get a clear invitation to the patient to share information. Different ways of asking (eg "Are you the sort of person who..?"), Accept the patient's right not to know.
<b>K</b>	Knowledge	Imparting information. 'Aligning' = start at a place compatible with the patient's current comprehension. Use small chunks. Use English not Medspeak. Acknowledge all patient's responses and tailor delivery of information appropriately to patient's responses
<b>E</b>	Emotions	Acknowledge emotions and their origins – patient's and your own - and respond appropriately. Explore, validate and empathise their emotional responses.
<b>S</b>	Strategy & Summary	Make a plan via explanation and collaboration. Summarise main areas. Any questions for now? Contract for next contact.

How to protect hope?





# Oncologist

Only  
hope  
- to  
be  
cured

- I destroy his hope
- I have nothing to offer

# Patient

Different  
hopes

- Similar level of hope in patients treated radically and palliatively. Hope to be cured was not the most important! With time, less important.....
- [*Sanatani et al. Support Care Cancer 2008;16:493-9*]
- Patient and family - hope taken from the meeting with the doctor (even if it was a „breaking bad news“ [*Mack et al. J Clin Oncol. 2007;25:5636-42*])

## Patient hopes:

Be cured					
Symptom control	Resolving the conflicts in family	To be with loved ones	To find a meaning	To summarize his life, to feel that life was full of good meaning and valuable; to be prepared to death	Good dying
Longer life					Heaven
	To be in clean environment	To be respected in his choice	To be able to trust a doctor		
Not to be alone					

Spectrum of hopes

**Aim  
important  
for the  
patient**



**I can  
reach it!**



**Hopes and  
„small  
hopes“**

## **Hopefulness**

- Hope is a mechanism that optimizes our ability to function. Groopman calls hope “as vital to our lives as the very oxygen we breathe”.
- “He defined hope as the belief that tomorrow can be better than today” (J. Groopman, 2004)

# How to protect hope while breaking bad news?

- To support hopefulness
- To help defining/finding new hopes/small hopes
- And thanks to these, to avoid futile treatment but with respect of the patient styles of coping

# Techniques

„Leaving the door open“: .

- „I can see you hope to be cured. But do you have any other hopes?“

„Wish statements“

- „I wish there were treatments that could cure your cancer“

Paradox: „hoping for the best while preparing for the worst“

- I agree that hope is so important and nobody can take that away from you. It is important for us also to discuss what we will do if the cancer does continue to progress, so that plans are in place for you and your family...”

- “Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good.”
- “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out”
- *Václav Havel*