

# Hard Truths, Soft Landings: Delivering Bad News with Compassion

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# Objectives

1. Identify the unique challenges of delivering bad news in the emergency department.
2. Understand the importance of an intentional approach to delivering bad news.
3. Apply key communication techniques to deliver bad news in a compassionate and clear manner.



But First ... Meet Drew!

# Why Should You Care?

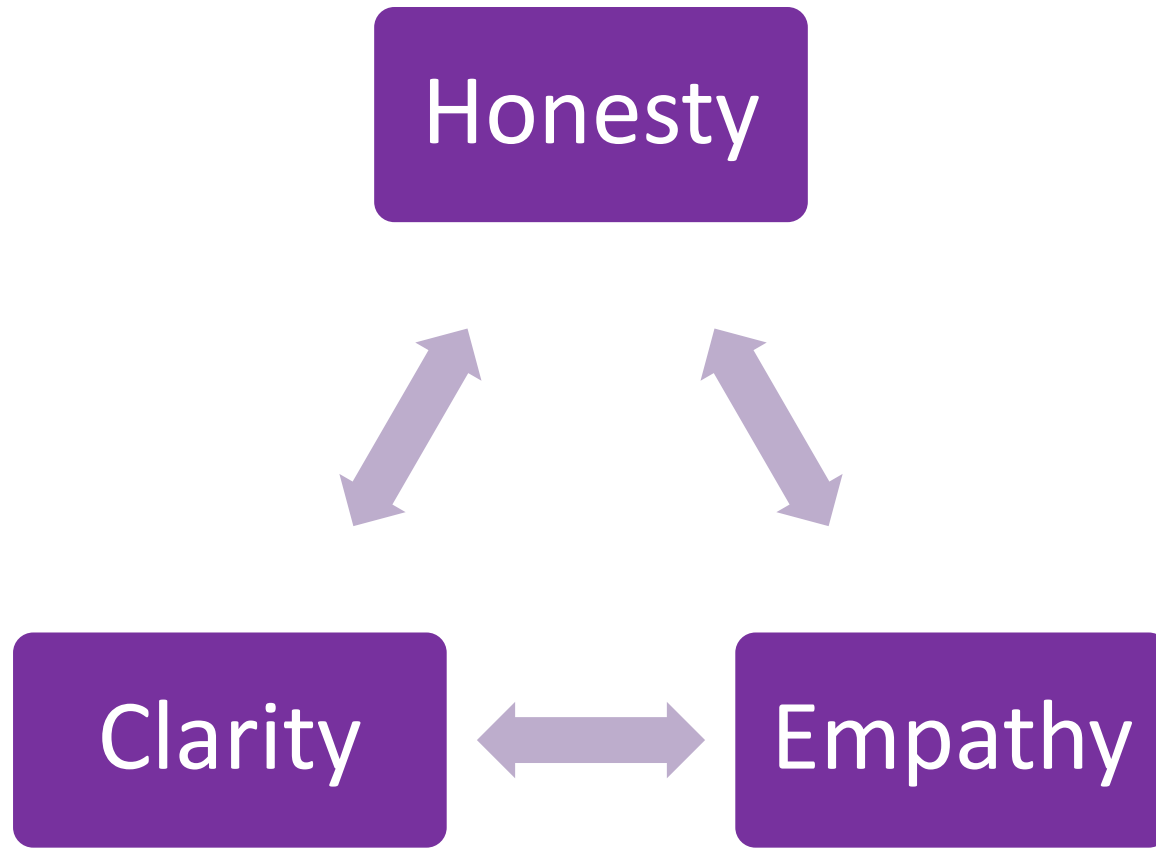
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High-stress, time-sensitive situations.

The impact on patient trust, family coping, and professional integrity.

# Core Elements of Compassionate Communication

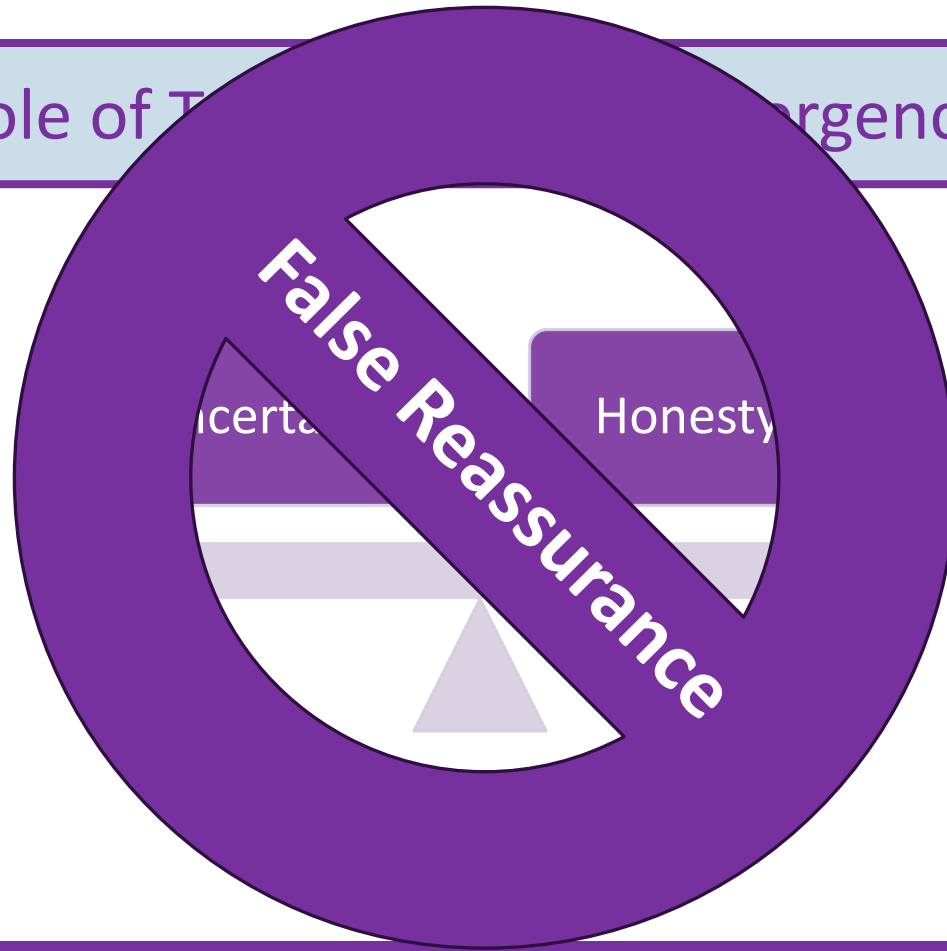
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# Importance of Honesty About Potential Diagnoses

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The Role of T... Emergency Care



# Importance of Clear Follow-Up Instructions

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- **Why do clear follow-up instructions matter?**
  - Follow-up ensures continuity of care and prevents missed or delayed diagnoses.
  - A lack of follow-up can lead to progression of undiagnosed conditions, worsening patient outcomes.



# The SPIKES Protocol

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AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO DELIVERING BAD  
NEWS



# SPIKES Protocol

- **Designed at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center**
- **Goal is to help healthcare professionals to accomplish the following while breaking bad news:**
  - Establish an appropriate setting
  - Check the patient's perception of the situation prompting the news regarding the illness or test results
  - Determine the amount of information known or how much information is desired
  - Know the medical facts and their implication before initiating the conversation
  - Explore the emotions raised during the interview
  - Respond with empathy
  - Establish a strategy for support

# SPIKES Protocol

## S – Setting Up

### Optimal Communication

- Prepare what to say
- Review appropriate vocabulary and information
- Discuss with collaborators

### Physical Space

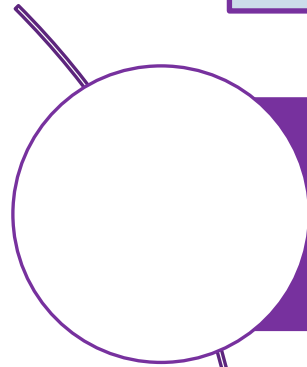
- Provide a quiet space
- Reduce technological distractions

### Body Language

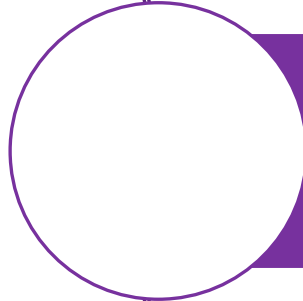
- Sit while speaking
- Maintain an open posture
- Maintain eye contact
- Eliminate evidence of nervousness

# SPIKES Protocol

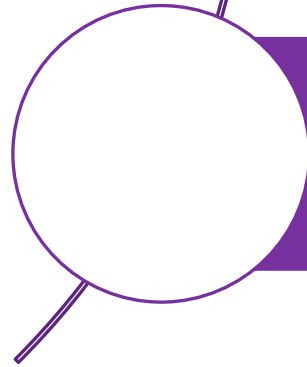
## P - Perception



Use empathetic communication to explore the patient and family's perception of the illness or events to date



Assess for illness denial



Respect the level of information desired, but have the patient & family be informed enough to provide informed consent

## I - Invitation

**Once an inquiry has been made as to the extent of understanding and the context in which the information fits, the NP can then ask for permission to share the current news.**

**Using what the patient has shared about their understanding of the illness and the context in which testing has been done, the NP then asks permission to share the current information.**

# SPIKES Protocol

## K - Knowledge

### "Fire a Warning Shot"

- "Unfortunately, I have some bad news ..."
- "The findings are not what we had hoped ..."

### Give news based on patient's level of understanding, compliance, & wishes for disclosure

- Show concrete examples
- Speak slowly
- Choose your words carefully

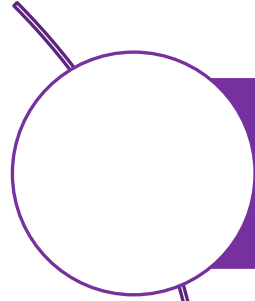
## E - Empathy

**Patients will have a wide range of emotional reactions as they respond to the bad news delivered.**

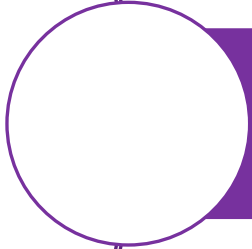
**You should show an understanding of the patient's emotion and demonstrate empathy and respect in the face of a difficult situation.**

# SPIKES Protocol

## S – Strategizing for the Future



Ensure the patient understands the information provided



Establish a clear plan



Do what you can to facilitate follow-up

**DON'T FORGET!**



**YOU MATTER TOO!**



# Self Care for Providers

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Emotional Impact of  
Delivering Bad News

A light purple arrow pointing downwards from the first box to the second box.


Strategies for Emotional  
Resilience

A light purple arrow pointing downwards from the second box to the third box.


Importance of Team Support

# KEY TAKE-AWAYS


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Honest, clear, and compassionate communication is essential in the ED.



Effective delivery of bad news can improve patient trust, outcomes, and reduce emotional trauma.



Balancing transparency with sensitivity ensures professionalism while maintaining empathy.



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Thank you!

# References

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