

# Bad News Communication: Vision of The Specialist Professional in Mental Health and Psychiatry

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## Abstract

The work of healthcare professionals involves dealing with delicate and often difficult situations, such as breaking bad news to patients and their families. When communicating bad news, it is necessary to reinforce the meaning of Caring, that is, reaching out to others, being available to develop communication skills, assuming permanent and effective monitoring behavior. By being in possession of knowledge, techniques and diagnoses, the health professional admits that, when communicating bad news, weaknesses stand out and this must be recognized with humility! As communicating bad news is an inevitable part of personal and professional life, it requires emotional protection that allows negative effects to be minimized and emotional balance to be maximized, through emotional resilience.

**Keywords:** Communication, Bad News, Mental Health.

## Introduction

The definition of bad news includes “information that may cause significant discomfort or sadness for those who receive it... all information that involves a drastic and negative change in the person's life and outlook for the future” [1]. Examples of bad news include unfavorable medical diagnoses such as an incurable, irreversible and progressive disease/ contexts of amputations/ the need for surgical intervention for patients with a phobia of invasive procedures/ having to inform a pregnant woman of the death of her fetus or the detection of embryonic anomalies that could compromise their viability/having to communicate to an athlete the impossibility of practicing their sporting activity due to irreversible injury/ having to communicate to a young person that they have a chronic illness that will require them to make changes in their life/deaths/ others.

When approaching the topic of communicating bad news, it is important to reflect that more than a set of cold and objective words, like the content it represents, this communication should be a set of words rich in affection, support and humanization. In reality, rich words such as Humanization and Caring are the basis of health professions and represent 3 moments in the care process... meeting... welcoming... accompanying..., that is, assuming an attitude that represents a true perspective to each other and to their context [2].

## Discussion

Communicating bad news has an impact on the patient, and it is imperative to understand that emotions depend on the situation and the individual's personality. It is common for people to experience emotions such as shock, fear, sadness, anxiety, anger, confusion, fright, agitation, disbelief and lability, accompanied by feelings of guilt, frustration and nonconformity, feelings of loss of control and uncertainty regarding the future, worry with the financial situation. These emotions may arise due to understanding the seriousness of the situation, concerns about the impact on daily life, uncertainty regarding treatment and the future, as well as the feeling of loss of control over one's own health. Family members also feel resentful at this time of communicating bad news, showing different emotions such as shock, sadness, anger, despair, concern for their loved one, feelings of guilt, fear and revolt, feelings of loss of control, revealing the need for support and Additional Information. In this context, sadness, shock, confusion, emotional overload, stress, the need to deal with the emotions of the patient and other family members, physical and mental exhaustion, fear of future challenges also arises in the person of the caregiver in this context. And what about professionals? It is increasingly recognized that the strain that this situation causes on health professionals who deal with this reality, and in fact, feelings of sadness, impotence, guilt, frustration, discomfort and fear, escape mechanisms, avoiding contact or

providing quick and superficially, disruption to the therapeutic relationship and professional self-confidence, emotional overload and physical and mental exhaustion may appear.

Communicating bad news, as you can see, is a significant challenge for both those who receive it and those who communicate it. This situation can be affected by some communication barriers that can be considered common to patients and health professionals, such as discomfort with the topic/ wanting to avoid or postpone discussion of the problem/ the strength of the deep-rooted myth that talking about progression of illness or death, can precipitate them/ the duty of mutual protection, all of this sustaining the constraints of difficult communication. Internalizing the specific figure of the patient, there are barriers specific to the patient, such as concern about caregivers' overload and loss of autonomy, various fears about the possible need to change doctors, the progression of the disease, making decisions, fear of discrimination, the perspective of the idea of the End and the fact that it is preferable to talk about Life and not Death.

At the level of healthcare professionals, dealing with younger patients, the fear of losing hope and reducing expectations, logistical constraints such as lack of adequate space, and the professional not feeling prepared, are also barriers to communication.

However, there are factors that facilitate the communication of bad news, common to patients and healthcare professionals. The quality of communication and established therapeutic relationship, trust in the professional, the existence of previous experiences with the same healthcare team and the continuity of the therapeutic relationship are considered favorable. In the specific situation of patients, facilitating factors may be: concern for quality of life and autonomy, the possibility of personalized treatment, recognition of technical competence, support from family or friends, trust in the team, as well as experience prior to it. For health professionals, good preparation for the conversation, sensitivity to the patient's context, previous experiences, a good therapeutic relationship, support from the family present and being able to contribute to continued monitoring, prove to be facilitating factors for more effective communication. effective.

For some authors, "Breaking bad news is an emotional challenge, but it can be done effectively, based on adequate preparation and a compassionate approach. While we can't control every situation, we can control our communication and the way we connect with others. By following some strategies, it is possible to minimize the negative impact and offer support during difficult times" [3]. Therefore, health professionals should invest in communication skills that involve adequate preparation (it is important to be prepared with detailed information about the situation, support options and available resources)/ empathy, sensitivity and understanding for the difficult situation/ clarity and transparency in communication, avoiding beating around the bush, confusing language and technical terms/ choosing the right moment to avoid interruptions/ knowing how to provide a calm and welcoming environment to carry out the conversation with privacy and security/ ensuring that the affected person has time to process the information and respecting their pace

with patience and availability/ respect and consideration for the affected person's feelings, allowing them to ask questions, express emotions and make informed decisions/, showing attention to their needs and concerns/ giving space for the affected person to express reactions, emotions and fears/ use of non-abusive touch/ active listening with attention to the patient's non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body language and silences/ show genuine interest in what the patient has to say/ avoid judgments or interruptions during the listening process, respect denial and accepting emotional ambivalence/ offering emotional support to the affected person/ presenting options to minimize the impact of the bad news/ encouraging the participation of family members or trusted people if the patient wishes/ supporting the patient's family/ making relevant information and resources available, such as psychological support services or support groups/continuous monitoring with availability to clarify doubts and listen to concerns, interdisciplinary teamwork.

As the communication of bad news is inevitable in the career path of professionals, it is important that they develop Emotional Resilience mechanisms as a way of protecting themselves and thus providing better support to those who depend on them. In this perspective of caring for those who care, some mechanisms are considered such as effective self-knowledge/being able to accept and deal with one's own emotions/physical and emotional self-care (sleeping adequately, eating healthy, practicing physical exercise, setting aside time for leisure activities) /establish healthy limits/find healthy ways to deal with stress (physical exercise, hobbies, meditation, therapy, relaxing activities)/learn and learn from each experience/seek opportunities for personal growth and development/seek support when needed/share experiences/ improve communication skills (learn to control tone of voice, body language and facial expression) / participate in supervision and debriefing sessions with colleagues or specialized professionals to manage emotions and deal with the emotional impact of breaking bad news / training of bad news communication strategies.

## Conclusions

The communication of bad health news is a topic that arouses great interest among professionals and concerns about how it should be processed. If, on the one hand, a paternalistic stance remains rooted, which is all the more evident the greater the proximity to the patient, on the other hand an ideal approach emerges, which must be individualized and centered on the patient, given that bad news deeply affects people. involved.

Health professionals feel training gaps in this area and express a desire to acquire relational skills that allow them to better deal with this experience, so they must be prepared and use appropriate strategies. Therefore, communicating bad news requires skills of empathy, respect, clarity, transparency, privacy and emotional support, to help the patient deal with the news, promote understanding and facilitate decision-making about the future. It is important to reflect on this reality, as the communication of bad news can also affect professionals emotionally, and it is necessary and essential that they know and can effec-

tively manage their emotions, as paraphrasing Jung “Know all the theories, master them all the techniques, but when touching a human soul, just be another human soul” [4].

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