Communicating Difficult News and Shared Decision Making in Cancer

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Objectives

- How to communicate effectively?
- What makes it so difficult?
- For the physician?
- For the Patient?
- How to share decision making?
Case Presentation...

- 78 y/o F presents to clinic – ED follow up
- Hx 80 pack year of smoking on home oxygen 3 L constantly
- In ED presented with symptoms of weakness of left arm and leg
- Slow and insidious in onset
- Increased shortness of breath
In ED – She had stat evaluation of stroke
CT head no stroke but mass with secondary mass affect
CT chest/Abd/pelvis – Lung mass with liver involvement and multiple enlarge nodes
Leaves ED AMA does not want to be hospitalized if not having an acute stroke
Continued...

- She is now sitting in your exam room...
- With her 2 daughters and their respective wives.
- Now What?
- Suggestions?
Number one...

- This is not about you!
- You do not need to have all the answers.
- Relax before going in!
- Calm yourself by slow deep breathing before entering!
- Instruct your staff not to interrupt you unless either for an emergency or by a certain time!
Investing in the beginning

- Introduce yourself to everyone in the room
- Refer to the patient by their respective last name or title
- Make a social comment about the weather, sports, something non-medical to put them at ease
Continued

- Consider the patients social and ethnic background as appropriate
- Start with open ended questions
- I understand that you were in the hospital, how are you today...
Why me?
How would you continue at this point?
A) So you have probably have cancer are you ready to die?
B) What do you understand as a result of your ER visit?
C) So it looks like you have a mass I will send you right over to get a biopsy and than we can start chemo very soon!
I understand that I probably have advanced metastatic cancer after talking with the ED MD

The most important thing to me; is to be pain free with out suffering and to be with my family.
Demonstrate Empathy

- As culturally appropriate demonstrate empathy.
- “This sounds very challenging how are you doing overall”
- She started crying that she was concerned about her children and their well being
- I offered her a hug which she gladly accepted
On evaluation by p-phone consult

IR could not access hilar mass for a biopsy and pulmonary medicine was concerned about bronchoscopy due to her severe COPD

She refused biopsy as she did not want to end up ventilator dependent

She did not want a chemo as she was afraid of further debility.
What I am going to do?
How would you respond?

A) Please tell me more about your decision...
B) Are you crazy do you want to die?
C) Come on do it for your children.
D) You know you have to do it for me I hate it when my patients die!
E) It is a minor procedure and you should proceed with it.
Invest in the end

- When asked what she wanted?
- She stated she only wanted treatment that would not weaken her
- But help with suffering.
- She was started on palliative radiation
- Enrolled in hospice for symptom management at her daughter’s home
Complete the visit

- When asked about her concerns
- She wanted to have the most quality time!
- Minimize the burden to her family!
- Be at home as much as possible!
- Her physician encouraged her to call with any questions or difficulties
- That if he was unable to answer them he would find the appropriate resource for them.
In Conclusion

- She was at peace with her decision
- Her family supported her completely
- She lived at home until she died about 8 weeks later
- In the obituary they thanked the MD and staff for being involved in the entire process
By Involving the patient and family

- They have more sense of control
- They have less depression and anxiety
- It is important they do not feel abandoned by their physician and health care team
- The care givers are less likely to have depression afterwards
Questions for audience?

- How would you have wrapped up this case?
- Do you call patients families or send condolence cards after your patient dies?
- Who has had a family or friend die?
- What helped?
Continued Questions?

- What made it a disaster?
- How would you have changed it?