How to Break Bad News:
The Six-Step Protocol
*adapted from: Applebaum “Breaking Bad News”

Step 1. Start off well
  ➞ Get the physical context right
  ➞ Where?
  ➞ Who should be there?
  ➞ Starting off

Step 2. Find out how much the patient knows

Step 3. Find out how much the patient wants to know

Step 4. Share the information (Aligning and Educating)
  ➞ Decide on your agenda (diagnosis, treatment plan, prognosis, and support)
  ➞ Start from the patient’s starting point (Aligning)
  ➞ Educating
    • Give information in small chunks
    • Use English not Medspeak
    • Check reception frequently
    • Reinforce and clarify the information frequently
    • Check your communication level (adult-adult, etc.)
    • Listen for the patient’s agenda
    • Try to blend your agenda with the patient’s agenda

Step 5. Responding to the patient’s feelings
  ➞ Identify and acknowledge the patient’s reaction

Step 6. Planning and follow-through
  ➞ Organizing and planning
  ➞ Making a contract and follow-through

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