

TIPS FOR SHARING DIFFICULT NEWS WITH THE FAMILY

TOOLS FOR HEALTHCARE
PROFESSIONALS

Patient families often say that the moment they got a diagnosis or other difficult news has stayed with them forever - they remember every word, every detail of that conversation. We hope these tips will help:

Know that the information you're about to share may forever split the life of the family into before and after. The significance of that can't be underestimated.

Share the news in person whenever possible, if not possible then by telehealth appointment or phone. Do not share the news via patient portal or in a written form.

Give family choices where possible. For example: "The MRI revealed some findings. Would you like me to display the images?"

Do not offer false hopes or exaggerate worst case scenarios. If you don't know, it's ok to say so. Families value honesty and often say that they appreciate the provider saying that they just don't know.

Leave space for questions, but assume that if the news is extremely difficult or unexpected, the family will likely have many additional questions once they start absorbing the information. Provide the family with the best way to get quick responses, at least at the initial stages. Consider checking in with the family the next day to ask how they're doing and answer any new questions.

Connect them with a social worker/case manager who can help connect patients to resources and coordinate care.

A hug or kind word, all matter and help the family to feel that they're not alone.