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Letters to the Editor

Disclosure of bad news: a challenging practice?

La divulgation de mauvaises nouvelles : une pratique difficile ?

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Dear Editor,

Disclosing information that may cause some negative change in the understanding or expectations of a person now or in the future (bad news) constitutes a challenging and stressful task with adverse effects on the general condition and performance of healthcare workers.[1-3] We read the Black Ice article published in this journal, "Five ways to get a grip on the personal emotional cost of breaking bad news," by Preti and Sanatani,[1] Therefore, which used the acronym "GUARD": guidance and mentorship, unburden yourself, anticipate, rest and restoration, debriefing and reflection. The authors emphasized these tools to establish and maintain a sustainable, compassionate practice with reduced negative emotions for trainees and faculty alike.[1]

In this regard, a few additional studies may help advance this discussion. Yousuf et al.'s "Health professionals' views and experiences of breaking bad news in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a scoping review"[2] examined literature from 2006 to 2022, including 4,710 participants (physicians, nurses, and residents) mainly with cross-sectional designs or mixed methods, without theoretical frameworks. This review reported the positive attitudes of participants toward breaking bad news, but a lack of training and low awareness of established protocols were the main concerns.[2]

Another study, "The effect of guided group reflection on the ability and convenience of breaking bad news in pre-hospital emergency staff," by Zarezadeh et al., [3] compared emergency staff trained in breaking bad news with a control group.[3] There was a notable difference in the mean scores after the intervention (44.01 ± 6.21 in the test group and 31.40 ± 4.51 in the controls) and in mean scores of post-test (5.52 ± 1.64 in the test group and 3.50 ± 1.28 in the controls).[3]

In conclusion, the enhanced training of health care workers in breaking bad news may increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. Therefore, the earliest as possible, their educational programs should include theorical and practical activities for these students aiming the best professional management of this challenging activity.

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