

Cultural Issues

COMMUNICATING THE DIAGNOSIS OF SEVERE ILLNESS (BAD NEWS)

In your country, how do doctors communicate a poor diagnosis?

Ymane answers first:

I am from Tunisia and I spoke with a doctor who had just had an appointment with a patient and had to deliver bad news. Saddened, the doctor told me the following:

“Today I saw a patient whom I diagnosed with lung cancer. I waited for him to respond, but nothing. His silence put me in a very difficult position. I’d rather he’d said something. Anything. I could not get through to him. What could I have done?”

Ahmed, a student from Tunisia continues:

“In Tunisia many doctors do not reveal a poor diagnosis to the patient. They consider this to be a very delicate and difficult task. They wonder about the benefits of making such a call. In such circumstances, Tunisian doctors prefer to inform the family. To not know a poor diagnosis may be beneficial to the patient, as the body is not burdened by the anguish of knowing the end.”

Maroua and Asma add:

“In France, telling or not telling the patient the truth is a real dilemma. Telling the truth makes it easier to collaborate with the patient, thus informed. On the other hand, such news may compromise the psychological state of the patient and undermine the quality of living, which is why doctors may decide to conceal the diagnosis. In western countries, DEATH is taboo. Ethically, though, it is recommended to tell the truth.”

Exercise: What is your opinion on the matter?

Yacub steps in with this piece of information:

In Casablanca, oncologists meeting at the first Communication Workshops organized by the Lalla Salma Association express the following concerns:

How does one communicate a cancer diagnosis?

How does one deal with a cancer patient?:

How does one avoid the doctor’s stress when presented with a terminal patient?

How does one communicate a difficult treatment?

How does one approach the family in such a situation?

How does one manage the emotions of a patient facing death?

Is it a good idea that the doctor remain neutral towards the patient?

Should a doctor refuse to see a patient when the patient is beyond help?

Topics for Forum:

- You, as future doctors, how would you answer these questions?