How to Message Brain Death
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CONSISTENT MESSAGING
Earlier in parallel with the Loss of a Loved Person (Smulda, Hegedus, Mihaly, Szabo, & Fazakas, 2012).
Consistent Messages: Language

• Discuss expectations for outcomes even if they are uncertain

• Use language appropriate with grave prognosis and then death

• Timely & candid discussions are essential for emotional preparedness

• Incorporate empathetic statement
Consistent Messages: Language

“I am very concerned he is getting worse”

“We are not seeing the brain react”

“The machine is doing all the breathing for him”

“She is not on any sedation.”
Consistent Messages: Actions

• Ask-Tell-Ask as a rule of thumb
• Team huddles/shift change discussions regarding communication with family
• Family meetings
• Communication of prognosis to family
Consistent Message: Tools

• Share information during neurological checks
• Allow family to observe the clinical exam
• Show family pictures from the Blood Flow Study
• Show family EEG results
ATTEMPT to...

• Ensure non-contradictory information is being provided

• Prepare families for what they will see

• Establish referrals for additional services (i.e. Palliative Care, Spiritual Care).
Challenges: Hope

• To promote realistic expectations versus taking away hope.

How can we respond?

“Have you ever seen anyone recover from this type of injury?”
Pay ATTENTION to the...

• Emotional distress of the situation
• Inability to process information
• Search for control
• Need to establish and maintain trust
Challenges: Honesty

• To maintain our credibility and the credibility of our colleagues.

How can we respond?

“How Nurse Jane told us that he is doing better. You give us nothing but bad news, we don’t want you to take care of our son anymore.”
EXPECT...

• Emotional swings

• Loss of hope coupled with unrealistic expectations of survival

• Fantasy of a coma as opposed to brain death

• Internal dialogue (recalling last conversation, memories, etc.)

• Anchoring
Challenges: Trust

• To maintain communication when trust is compromised.

How can we respond?

“We want to move him to another hospital, where they know what they are doing.”
AKNOWLEDGE the difficulty of...

- Being in a foreign environment
- Not being able to meet physical needs (i.e., sleep, nutrition etc.)
- Sharing information with extended family & friends
- Saying goodbye
- Making a decision about donation
Challenges: Power

• To set boundaries without engaging in a power struggle.

How can we respond?

“I am not leaving, I don’t care if it is shift change. It is my right to be here and we will have as many people in here as we want.”
Give TIME to..

• Realize the inevitability of death.

• Understand the cause of death.

• Discuss with other family members

• Seek reassurance for any concerns
QUESTIONS?
References


Thank you for sharing in our mission, to save lives through organ and tissue donation and transplantation.