

# *Breaking Bad News*

## A Web-Based Educational Program for Physicians

Kathleen Ciccone, Principal Investigator  
Healthcare Association of New York State  
Breast Cancer Demonstration Project™  
One Empire Drive, Rensselaer, NY 12144  
(518) 431-7661 [www.hanys.org](http://www.hanys.org)

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# The S-P-I-K-E-S Strategy for Breaking Bad News

An effective way to communicate important information, give bad news, and provide crucial support and compassion to patients.

Dr. Robert Buckman

Medical Oncologist

Princess Margaret Hospital

University of Toronto

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# Breaking Bad News

“The bad news about breaking bad news is that bad news is bad news.”



# Breaking Bad News

## A Definition:

Bad news is any news that seriously and adversely affects the patient's view of his or her future.



# Breaking Bad News

“BEFORE YOU TELL, ASK.”



# Breaking Bad News

Separate MESSAGE from MESSENGER

- Even though the message is bad, the messenger can be seen as part of the support system.



# Breaking Bad News

- S** Getting the **SETTING** right,
- P** What the patient **PERCEIVES**,
- I** An **INVITATION** to share the news,
- K** Giving the **KNOWLEDGE**,
- E** **EMPATHISING & EXPLORING** the patient's emotions, and
- S** **STRATEGY** and **SUMMARY**.



# Breaking Bad News

## S - SETTING

### ➤ Physical Context:

- privacy
- family members
- body language - sit down
- eye contact
- positioning



# Breaking Bad News

## ➤ Physical Context:

- body language and positioning
- “the psychotherapy neutral position”



# Breaking Bad News

## ➤ Listening Skills:

- silence
- repetition
- “listening mode”
- touch (as appropriate)
- avoid office interruptions



# Breaking Bad News

**P** - Finding Out What the Patient Knows or **PERCEIVES**

- Different ways of asking
- Assess vocabulary and comprehension
- Note denial (if present)



# Breaking Bad News

## I - INVITATION by the Patient to Share the Information

- Different ways of asking
- Level of information to provide
- Aim to get a clear invitation



# Breaking Bad News

## K - Giving the **KNOWLEDGE** and Medical Facts

- Aligning—starting at a point compatible with the patient's current comprehension and terminology



# Breaking Bad News

## **K** *(continued)* Giving **KNOWLEDGE**

- Small chunks - check reception
- Avoid “medspeak”
- Adjust pace according to patient’s response
- Acknowledge all responses



# Breaking Bad News

## E - Acknowledging **EMOTIONS**

- Avoid downplaying severity of situation
- The “Empathic Response”



# Breaking Bad News

## The Empathic Response

1. Identify the emotion (theirs or yours)
2. Identify the source of the emotion
3. Respond in a way that shows you have made that connection

- You don't have to agree with the viewpoint
- You don't have to feel the emotion yourself



# Breaking Bad News

**E-V-E:** The key to addressing emotions

Each response should be one of these

- **EXPLORING**
- **VALIDATING**
- **EMPATHIC**



# Breaking Bad News

## S - STRATEGY & SUMMARY

- Develop plan collaboratively
- Summarize main areas
- “*Any questions for now?*”
- Clear plan for next steps



# A Summary

## The S-P-I-K-E-S Method

- Easy to remember steps
- Physicians can separate themselves from the “bad news”
- A quality and fair approach for good patient care



# Breaking Bad News

*“ Breaking bad news is never easy or pleasant: but at least having some plan or approach increases the professional’s feeling of confidence - and that is often perceived as increased competence.”*



# Breaking Bad News

## References

- CD-ROM set, *A Practical Guide to Communication Skills in Cancer Care*, by Drs. Robert Buckman and Walter F. Baile includes scenarios illustrating the S-P-I-K-E-S strategy in clinical practice. Order by calling **(866) 488-8234**.
- HANYS BCDP™ *Provider Tools for Bridging the Gap: A Resource Kit for Helping Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer Patients*©. Free download at [www.hanys.org/quality\\_index/Breast\\_Cancer\\_Project/resourcekits.htm](http://www.hanys.org/quality_index/Breast_Cancer_Project/resourcekits.htm)



# Giving Bad News ...

- Good patient care
- Fulfillment as a physician



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