Be the Calm in the Storm

Managing Challenging conversations in the medical arena

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Presenters

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Disclosure

No disclosures.
Objectives

• Learn about the physiological responses occurring in both providers and patients during challenging conversations

• Identify strategies to remain calm and diffuse highly emotional interactions with patients and caregivers

• Effective strategies to communicate challenging news to patients, family members and other clinicians
What Makes These Conversations So Hard?

- Content of meetings can be emotionally charged
- Patients/families already feeling stressed
- Clinicians feel stressed
- Medical information can be hard to understand
Autonomic Nervous System

https://youtu.be/wANxsM5Q36c
Let’s Break That Down a Bit

Here’s the Bits to Remember:

- Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is subconscious
- Has helped to keep us (as a species) alive
- Can cause instantaneous imbalance
- Redirects resources from our immune system and digestive processes to help us escape.
What’s Happening When You’re Stressed?

https://youtu.be/0IDgBICHVsA
Let’s Get Real for a Minute
• Director Emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) for Mind-body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital

• Mind-Body Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School

Herbert Benson, M.D.
Activating the Relaxation Response

“You can use the mind to change the body, and the genes we're changing were the very genes acting in an opposite fashion when people are under stress.”

-- Herbert Benson, M.D.
Putting Out the Fire

“The single most effective relaxation technique I know is conscious regulation of breath”

Dr. Andrew Weil
### Benefits of Relaxation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Slows heart rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lowers blood pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Slows breathing rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Improves Digestion</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduces activity of stress hormones</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Maintains Normal Blood Sugar</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increases flow of blood to major muscle groups</td>
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<td>• Improves concentration &amp; mood</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduces muscle tension &amp; chronic pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Boosts confidence to handle problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lowers fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduces anger &amp; frustration</td>
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<td>• Improves sleep quality</td>
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Ways The Breath Helps in the Moment

• Noticing What’s Going On in the Room
• Distancing Yourself from the Emotion
• Be a Mirror—Reflecting What You Want to Show Up
  - Lower Voice
  - Slower Pace
  - Open Posture
  - Eye Contact
• And Keep Breathing!
Can’t Emphasize This Enough

practice
practice
practice
practice
Therapeutic Communication

What’s It is And How to achieve it
Effective Medical Communication

• Both gathers and transmits information

• Builds a helping alliance to allow for healing

• Assesses the patient’s perceptions

• Gains permission to provide additional insight or information

• Listens actively, being silent when it’s necessary
Communication is a Skill

- 55% Non-Verbal
- 35% Tone
- 10% Verbal
Communication Skills

• Being Present

• Demonstrating Empathy

• Non-Verbal Cues

• Active Listening
Begin with Being Present

“Therapeutic presence is foundational to promoting a client’s safety, a core prerequisite for effective therapeutic work...As such, we also argue that understanding and cultivating therapeutic presence should be viewed as an essential foundation.”

Sharon Geller & Stephen Porges
Examples of Non-Presence

• Busyness – moving from one patient to the next without any pause
• Not listening to bodily needs such as hunger, thirst, bathroom needs
• Squeezing in email checks and calls without a moment’s pause
• Stress or overwhelm with one’s own ongoing issues
Demonstrating Empathy

• Start with a Beginner’s Mind

• Be Curious

• Repeat your understanding of patient’s concern
Non-Verbal Cues

• The Power of the Pause

• Physical Touch

• Take a seat

Keep Breathing…
Active Listening

• Allows patient to feel heard

• Can be demonstrated by action
  - Nodding you head
  - Repeating or restating parts of what is said

Keep Breathing…
### IMPACT-ICU

#### Core Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Eliciting the other’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Statements</td>
<td>Show that you want to understand the other person’s perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell me more...</td>
<td>Opens the door to additional information in non-threatening and non-judgmental way</td>
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<tr>
<td>NURSE (Name, Understand, Respect, Support, Explore)</td>
<td>Demonstrates empathy in the face of strong feelings and emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask-Tell-Ask</td>
<td>Empowers both the patient/client and the professional to learn more about the situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hope/Worry Statements</td>
<td>Allows professional to join with client.</td>
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Open-ended Questions

• “What are you hoping for?”
• “What do you understand about your mom’s condition?”
• “What worries you the most about what’s going on right now?”
• “Tell me a little about what your husband was like before all of this?”
• “What information would be most helpful to you right now?”
• “What other questions do you have?”

......then LISTEN!
Reflections

These can be anything you notice about the person’s affect or the situation, or what you know happened earlier in the day/week.

• “It sounds like you have had a really tough talk with the doctor.”
• “It seems like you got a lot more information than you were expecting.”
• “This can be a lot for anyone to take in right now. It must feel overwhelming.”
Tell me more…

Patient: “This is simply not what I expected to hear today. “
Professional: “Tell me more.”

Or

Patient: “We had plans. We were just waiting till the kids were old enough, then we had plans…”
Professional: Tell me more.”
N.U.R.S.E.

• Name: “It can feel like no one is really listening to you.”
• Understand: “I understand that can be incredibly frustrating.”
• Respect: “You are doing a really good job in a tough situation.”
• Support: “We are here for you.”
• Explore: “How can we help?”
Ask-Tell-Ask

Can be particularly valuable when you need to communicate with the medical team.

• Ask: “I just met with Ms. Jones. Do you have a minute to hear my concerns?”

• Tell: “Ms. Jones believes that the treatments for her metastatic disease will cure her. I don’t think she realizes that when we’re talking about treating her disease, it does not mean curing.”

• Ask: “Do you think you’ll be able to address this with her the next time you see her?”
Hope/Worry Statements

• “I hope there are more treatment options, but I worry about your quality of life if things continue the way they are going.”

• “I hope you’re right and this treatment will turn things around, but I worry about you spending more time in the hospital than you want to.”
When Anger Enters the Room
Listening to Words Spoken in Anger

- Pause, breathe, pay attention
- An angry person needs more personal space
- Sit at a 90 degree angle
- Palms up, head slightly down
- Breathe some more
- Remain calm (defensiveness is not helpful)
- Show Empathy
- Do not minimize
Keep In Mind…

The function of listening is to **UNDERSTAND** what the other person is saying…

not necessarily to **AGREE** with it.
Let’s Meditate
Putting it All Together: C.A.L.M.

- Center and breathe
- Acknowledge that this is hard for everyone involved
- Let go of preconceived notions and ideas
- Mindfully engage with the patient and/or family
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References


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