

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WHEN DELIVERING BAD NEWS TO THE PATIENT

Communicating effectively with a patient who experienced a severe maternal event requires you to first recognize their perspective. These are otherwise healthy individuals who came with expectations of joy and unexpectedly faced a rare and life-threatening condition they have likely never heard of. Commonly, the patient has no recollection of the event, is heavily medicated, and may have a cognitive impairment, thus making them especially susceptible to further trauma. Additionally, they recognize the emotions on their loved ones' faces and begin to understand the seriousness of their condition.

The initial interaction with the patient is not the time to explain all the medical details and terminology. We suggest an iteration of, "Your body has been through a lot. When you are ready I will go over all of the details. In the meantime, let's focus on getting you rested." *Below are recommendations to assist you in making sure your interactions limit further trauma.*

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EMOTIONS

- Allow yourself to express your feelings with trusted colleagues
- Accept you may not have all of the answers about the event or diagnosis
- Recognize and anticipate emotional responses from the patient

FORMULATE A PLAN

- Discuss with clinical team to get a consensus of the overall clinical picture for both mom and baby
- Identify key clinical points to be communicated in a clear and concise manner
- Prepare for any language barriers
- Determine timing of the conversation based on feedback of ICU team and family
- Assess the patient's readiness for more detailed information
- Coordinate with the NICU team to disseminate infant status with the patient

EXECUTE PATIENT COMMUNICATION

- Use clear, lay language with empathetic tone- avoid dramatic language and statistics
- Present basic facts, current condition, brief definition of AFE (see below)
- Explain 1-2 next steps for the patient - avoid overwhelming them with too much information
- Assess understanding and repeat any key information
- Inform patient they will receive printouts, guides, and that there is a community to assist them
- Document discussion in medical record



WHAT IS AN AFE?

Amniotic fluid embolism (AFE) is an unexpected life-threatening complication. It can affect both mother and baby. It is thought to be the result of an allergic-like reaction to the fluid that enters the mother's bloodstream. This is a normal part of the birth process for most mothers. It can occur during labor or soon after delivery and can cause serious breathing, blood pressure, and bleeding problems.