# DISCLOSING SERIOUS NEWS

## SPIKES¹:

| S - Setting | Quiet location with seats and tissues  
Before you go in, take a moment to review and agree upon the medical facts, goals of the meeting and who is going to lead if multiple clinicians are present |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P - Perception | “Just so I know where to begin, tell me what you understand about what’s going on medically”  
“What have the other doctors told you?” |
| I - Invitation | “I do have some new information to discuss, is it alright if we do that now?”  
“I have the results of your tests, is now a good time to discuss what they show?” |
| K - Knowledge | WARNING SHOT… “I have some serious news…”  
GIVE A HEADLINE – say it simply then STOP  
Avoid medical jargon |
| E - Emotions | Wait quietly for the patient to process the news  
N-U-R-S-E the emotion (see below) |
| S - Summarize/Strategize | “I know I’ve given you some big news. Do you feel ready to discuss where we go from here?”  
“Sometimes it’s hard to take this all in. Just so I know I was clear, can you tell me what you heard?” |

## NURSE²:

| N - Name | “It sounds like you’re [worried about your family]”  
“This is not what either of us were expecting” |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U - Understand | “I can’t imagine [how hard this must be]”  
“Anyone in your shoes would be [angry]” |
| R - Respect | “You have done everything right”  
“You’ve been a wonderful advocate for your mom” |
| S - Support | “I’ll be there every step of the way to answer your questions and help you through this.” |
| E - Explore | “Tell me more…”  
“What’s going through your head right now?” |

## PEARLS:

- **“I wish…” statement** Ex: “I wish more chemotherapy would help”
- **“We…” statement** Ex: “I know this isn’t what we were hoping for.”
- **Ask Permission** Ex: “Would it be helpful if I talked about next steps?”
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What patients value³...

We all have two “channels” in our brains: the emotion channel and the cognitive channel. The brain can only operate in one channel at a time. Your job is to figure out which of the patient’s channels needs attention so you can provide emotional support when needed and information/guidance when needed. You also have to be able to toggle back and forth between these two channels while your patient comes to terms with the news.

GIVE A HEADLINE²....less is more

Try to give the news in 1 short phrase. Just like a headline of an article, lead with the punch line. You can always follow with the details if it is helpful to the patient.

References: