

Building the Empathic Side of Clinical Practice – Special Web site Enhances Provider Communication Skills (with free online CME Ethics and Professional Responsibility credit)

www.mdanderson.org/icare

Conveying bad news to a patient or a patient's family is one of the most challenging aspects of being a medical doctor. It's an emotional, stressful and sometimes uncomfortable situation for both the patient and physician to experience. Healthcare providers know that patients evaluate the effectiveness of their care based on factors that extend far beyond the purely clinical. How well clinicians communicate has a significant impact not only on patients' evaluation of their care and health outcomes but is also related to patients' quality of life, psychological adjustment, compliance with care, and physician stress and burnout. Communication provides the basis for the establishment of trust and rapport between the patient and family and is necessary so that the patient and family can be appropriately informed about choices and educated about their care and the decisions they must make. Through The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center's Interpersonal Communication And Relationship Enhancement (**I*CARE**) Program, doctors have access to numerous educational resources designed to help improve their communication skills, become more comfortable handling difficult discussions and can obtain [FREE online CME credit](#) for viewing these video demonstrations. **I*CARE** is the work of world renowned communication skills experts [Walter F. Baile, M.D.](#), Professor, department of Behavioral Science, the late [Robert F. Buckman, M.D., PhD.](#), Medical Oncologist and [Cathy Kirkwood, MPH](#), Project Director.

There is little hands on communication skills training done in medical training programs, however skillful communication is a competency which can be taught and learned. The goal of the program is to be a resource for learning and teaching the skills necessary to manage challenging patient or family encounters and assist clinicians in extending their role beyond treating disease to establishing a therapeutic, supportive alliance with their patients. Since emotions play a powerful role in relationships with patients, there's a lot of anxiety and sadness in bringing bad news to someone. These modules show how to take the elephant in the room and shrink it down so it is a comfortable discussion for both parties by teaching how not to let your emotions get in the way and still tell the truth. The demonstrations cover a spectrum of conversations and teach effective responses to communication challenges to assist clinicians in sharpening their skills.

The site includes a module "[On Being An Oncologist](#)" where actors William Hurt and Megan Cole portray doctors and discuss their feelings about the stressors of caring for patients. The material in this video is based on focus groups conducted at MD Anderson by the department of Faculty and Academic Development where the program is housed. They teach [Fundamental Principles](#) of communication and each strategy is presented with explanations of what they are, how they work, as well as video vignettes that show a physician actually using them. The patients in these encounters are professional "standardized patient" actors, but the vignettes are unscripted depicting situations that arise not only in the practice of oncology but in all clinical practices.

[Introduction to Basic Principles: CLASS-EVE-SPIKES-CONES](#)

[Non-Verbal Communication - In Depth](#)

The site also has [Advanced Skills](#) modules for having conversations about end of life, transition to palliative care, how to discuss options when treatments are no longer working and more specific topics such as:

["Crossroads"](#): How to know when you've reached a point in conversation where these techniques are needed.

[Mr. Carter](#) - A man with lung cancer struggles to accept his illness (diagnosis, well-patient follow-up, recurrence transition to palliative care, end of life).

[Mrs. Anderson](#) - A patient with locally advanced breast cancer is followed from discussion of a clinical trial to the end of life and "saying goodbye."

[Mrs. Wright](#) - Guiding a patient with colon cancer through adjuvant chemotherapy, recurrence and palliative care.

["An Error Has Occurred..."](#) - A woman's son is told that his mother got the wrong dose of chemo.

["I'm Going To Mexico"](#) - A patient states that she is going for alternative treatment.

["My Mother's Not To Be Told"](#) - A patient's son demands that his mother not be told she has cancer.

["Don't Give Up On My Mother"](#) - A family member pleads for more treatment in the face of futility.

["Your Father Has Died"](#) - A physician announces a sudden death of a patient to his daughter.

["I Will Not Take Tamoxifen..."](#) - A patient has heard bad things about medicine she is prescribed.

["We'd Like To Discontinue Ventilation"](#) - A family is told that their loved-one is "brain dead."

["I'd Like More Information About Euthanasia"](#) - A patient expresses interest in assisted suicide.

["How Much Time Have I Got?"](#) - The doctor must respond to a difficult question about prognosis.

["The Patient Is Angry"](#) - A patient is very mad about a barium enema.

[Telephone Conversations](#) - Three situations that call for different strategies in giving test results.

[Genetic Counseling](#) - How to assess the need for genetic testing, evaluate the client and disclose the results.

[Culturally Competent Care](#) - Understanding how cultural competence builds trust and improves communication.

[Talking With Patients About Complementary Therapies](#) (No CME) – How to discuss these therapies with patients.

[Patients Talk About...Complementary Therapies And Cancer](#) (No CME) – Patient experiences to assist you in understanding why these therapies are important to them.

[What You Must Ask, And Why](#) (No CME) - The importance of communicating with patients about these therapies

Also included are materials on how to teach communication skills to others, [online lectures](#) from leaders in the field of clinical communication skills, and resources for both patients and providers. Free downloads of pocket guides to use as a quick review before having that difficult conversation are also available (hard copies are available upon request). The site has won numerous awards including the **2005 International Health and Medical Media (FREDDIE)** award for the series Complementary Therapies and Cancer and three Telly awards, is accredited by Health on the Net Foundation (**HONcode**) and addresses the requirements of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (**ACGME**) to obtain competencies in communication skills and professionalism.

Recognition and Awards

- 2013 [The University of Texas System Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award](#) – Walter F. Baile, M.D. - for delivery of the highest quality health education instruction
- 2012 eHealthcare Leadership Platinum Award - Best Health/Healthcare Content -Physician/Clinician Focused Site
- 2012 Distinguished Teaching Professor – Walter F. Baile, M.D. – Outstanding Contributions to Education
- 2012 [John P. McGovern Award](#) (American Medical Writers Association) - [Walter Baile, MD](#), [Cathy Kirkwood, MPH](#) - Excellence in Biomedical Communication making a National/International Impact
- 2012 I*CARE listed on [iCollaborative](#) a service of [AAMC's MedEdPortal](#)
- 2010 [Lynn Payer Award](#) - Walter F. Baile, MD - Outstanding Contributions to the Literature, Theory, Practice and Teaching of Effective Healthcare Communication
- 2010 Silver People's [TELLY award "Crossroads"](#) and - [2 bronze awards](#) (Education, Training)
- 2005 International Health & Medical Media (FREDDIE) Award - "Important Conversations"
- ACGME Outcome Project
- [Health on the Net](#) - HON Foundation - [Verify here](#)
- [Healthlinks Select Site](#)

For more information on these programs and resources, contact [Cathy Kirkwood, MPH](#), Project Director, Academic Affairs at: icare@mdanderson.org