

Breaking bad news

Breaking bad news is hard

We may have to tell the relatives of many of our residents that they are very ill, or have died

Its harder now because

- Relatives will not have been able to visit
- They may be less prepared for the news
- You will have to deliver the news by phone.

Use your skills and this process

Remember you have great skills to use in this situation:

- Caring, being in the moment, listening, showing you don't know

These guidelines will give you a structure to help you through the conversation.

Preparation

- Make sure you have time, a quiet space and won't be interrupted
- Make sure you the next of kin details and any specific instructions regards contact
- Try to get your feelings under control, but recognise that you are doing these roles because you care and do not worry if you do cry.

Prepare for leaving a message

It may be necessary to leave a voice mail – if this is the case:

- say who you are, team senior from xxx
- state the facts: I have some news to give and I will try you in xx mins, it may not be possible to phone back but xxx is very ill and has a high temp etc and we believe sick enough to die-

Prepare your opening words

Have a look and adapt the openers below to suit you.

- I have some sad news for you
- I have some difficult news for you
- I'm afraid xx worsened today/overnight
- I'm afraid the news isn't good
- I am ringing to let you know xx is very unwell

Then pause

Break the news

- Xx is has developed some Coronavirus like symptoms
- Xx is very poorly with Coronavirus like systems
- Xxx is very ill with the following symptoms and we believe sick enough to die, we are keeping xx comfortable, in bed , no pain,

Break the news

- xx is unwell, they have a DNACPR, following conversation with GP xx we believe xxx is sick enough to die, we are keeping xx comfortable, in bed, no pain
- xx is unwell they do not have a DNACPR but following conversation with GP in view of their age and general health hospital admission has /has not been advised

Break the news

- I'm really sorry, Xx has died.
- Do not use words like passed away or gone as these are not clear and in a heightened state of emotion people do not fully take in or hear what is said.
- Try and pull what positives you can: They were comfortable, they were cared for, someone was with them, they died quietly and quickly

Acknowledge response

- Pause and then acknowledge their response.
- People may react in a variety of ways: distressed, matter of fact, angry, guilty
- Give the time and show empathy.

Answering questions

You may be asked why the resident wasn't taken to hospital, whether they can see them now or about funeral arrangements.

- Funerals are limited to small services with immediate family only (national advice)
- There is may be visiting and will need to be assessed on a case by case basis.
- Hospital transfers are highly unlikely due to the residents age and underlying conditions.

Answering questions

If have DNACPR on file probably no issue about hospital

If no DNACPR relatives may expect hospital attendance: this needs to be managed

Keep to the facts:

- going to hospital was not an option
- we have cared for their loved one and ensured they were not in pain

What happens next?

- We will be contacting a Funeral Director with the details we hold on file, details correct?
- If no details on file, ask if they have a preference or direct them to the local director
- They can get in touch if have more questions but in the first instance direct them to online resources and support
 - <https://www.samaritans.org/> or call free on 116123
 - <https://community.sueryder.org/c/coping-with-bereavement>

Looking after yourself

- Breaking bad news is draining. This is normal.
- Aim to debrief with a colleague or your manager wherever possible.
- You can also ring the Breaking Bad new support line on 0333 335 5293
- This is covered by JRF/JRHT colleagues 24/7
- You can also ring the EAP on Freephone 0800 988 8809