

MODULE 3

Challenging Consultations

Maternity



Delivering bad news. (Slide 67)

Background

Maeve is 7 weeks pregnant in her first pregnancy. She had some bleeding and pain yesterday and came for a scan today. On assessment she is generally well but the sonographer cannot see anything in utero on scan and there is a 4.5cm swelling on the right side and some fluid in the pouch. This is consistent with an ectopic pregnancy.

Say something like

“Now let’s look at a video of an obstetrician meeting with a woman after the sonographer has completed her scan. Watch the video clip and identify what communication skills the obstetrician uses.”

Skills

In this interaction, the obstetrician uses good communication skills to help him manage this challenging consultation. He:

- Starts with asking permission to sit down.
- **Introduced** himself – *'My name is Seosamh O'Coighligh.'*
- Clarified his **role**... *'I am the consultant on call today.'*
- **Preparation and handover:** *'I have just been talking with Paula about your scan result.'*
- **Warning shot:** *'I am afraid the news is not good'...*
- **Demonstrating empathy:** *'I am sorry to be giving you bad news like this, it is very upsetting for you'.../ 'I can see you are very upset and I am sorry to have to tell you'... 'Is there anyone you would like us to call.'*
- **Small chunks:** *'Paula has done the scan very thoroughly'* – pause – *'we can't see a pregnancy'* – pause – *'at 7 weeks, we should very clearly be able to see a pregnancy'* – pause.
- **Avoids/explains jargon:** *'We can't see a pregnancy inside the womb'/'and its just not there, I am afraid'.../ 'She is seeing a swelling outside the womb on the right hand side/an ectopic pregnancy.'*
- Used good **active listening** skills (head-nodding, leaning, eye-contact, *'mmm-hmm'*).
- **Body language:** sits down at eye level/warm facial expression/good eye-contact/calm tone of voice.
- **Spoke slowly and clearly:** *'I am afraid it means this pregnancy does not have a future and that you are not going to be getting a baby out of this pregnancy'* – pause – *'I am very, very sorry.'*
- **Understanding the patient's perspective/ picking up on non-verbals:** *'I think you may have suspected there was something wrong, I am sorry to have to confirm that for you'...*
- **Second warning shot:** *'You were asking about surgery earlier'...*
- **Checking understanding:** *'I have given you a lot of information, it's a lot to take in, especially when you are upset, do you have any questions you want to ask me at this stage?'*
- **Shared decision making:** *'Once I have the blood tests results, I will be coming back to you to talk about our options and what plans we need to make'...*
- **Next steps:** *'I will call back to see you when we have the blood results and if your partner is here, we can talk together about what is to happen from there.'*