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Open effective communication in cancer care: The difference between life and death

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Unfortunately, consultations are often just a meeting where physicians and/or nurses gather information, impart results and make choices for the patient. Sadly, little or no attention is given to developing and maintaining relationships or negotiating plans. Patient well-being dictates that this must change. Physicians and/or nurses must learn open effective communication to respond empathically to the patient's needs, rather than exhibit a cold professional detachment, respond to powerful reactions, such as those encountered when delivering bad news or having disagreements with angry patients and families, provide knowledge rather than articulate orders and alleviate their own levels of stress which may arise during consultations. Open effective communication is crucial to cancer patients' well-being, as it can either alleviate or activate a stress response. If stress is activated, it can impact tumor growth, progression and metastasis. As Hippocrates said cure sometimes, treat often and comfort always. These ancient words remain true for modern medicine. A doctor's ability to provide comfort through their presence and their words is a fundamental component for good medical care. Developing effective communication skills is an art to be fostered and refined over time. Focusing on and practicing open effective communication transforms the clinical consultation, taking no more time but bringing benefits for the patient, doctors and nurses.

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