



Project Number: 2016-1-RO01-KA203-024630

Communicating with Parents

Case Study: Cultural/religious differences

Problem addressed: cultural/religious differences

Soft skill: **Emotional intelligence, empathy; expressive communication, persuasion**

Method: **Case study, case-based learning**

Cultural and religious backgrounds may influence how things said with the best of intentions may be interpreted in unexpected ways.

A child was born with a serious heart condition that could not be treated surgically. The parents, immigrants from a non-western country, were informed about the poor prognosis and that any treatment would only postpone death. However, it was emphasized that treatment would not be discontinued if they disagreed. Gradually over several weeks, the situation grew worse. The nurses felt that the child was suffering severely and that the suffering was being prolonged by the active treatment. The parents, however, strongly resented withdrawal of treatment.

This case was planned as a prospective case discussion, but a few days before the scheduled meeting the child suddenly died. During the retrospective discussion, in the absence of the parents, it was agreed that this child had been treated too long at the expense of the best interests of the child and medical resources and contrary to the feelings and clinical judgement of the professionals. The committee also retrospectively found that according to the parents' religion and culture, the physicians' assurance that "nothing will be done unless you accept it" could have given the parents a sense of responsibility for the death of their child. This might have made it impossible for them to accept withholding the treatment. A paternalistic approach, stating that the physician would bear the responsibility of the decision that futile but life prolonging treatment must be withdrawn, might have been preferable to the parents and reduced the number of weeks of suffering for the child, the parents, and the nurses.

Source: <http://jme.bmj.com/content/31/2/73>



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