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Communicating with Parents

Case Study: Statements intended to comfort and maintain hope were interpreted as factual medical informationa

Problem addressed: statements intended to comfort and maintain hope were interpreted as factual medical information

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

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

In this case statements intended to comfort and maintain hope were interpreted as factual medical information.

A one year old boy had an unknown genetic syndrome, with no psychomotor development since birth. He had problems swallowing, was dependent on constant oxygen supplement and had frequent lung infections, which required respiratory treatment. The ethical dilemma identified was a conflict between the physicians who regarded treatment as only prolonging the child's suffering and the parents who wanted the active treatment to be continued.

The discussion in the CEC revealed that some nurses had told the parents "never to give up their child". The nurses' comments had made the parents suspect the physicians were not acting in the best interest of the child. The parents chose to believe only the comments which suggested hope of recovery. Here the CEC's suggested solution was to coordinate the information given to the parents by making information an explicit subject in the healthcare team and by documenting in the child's medical record what had been said to the parents and why. This was the only way to make the parents understand that further treatment was only prolonging the child's suffering.

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



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