

Delivering difficult news to children's families



Synopsis

There are many situations in therapeutic environments where allied health professionals need to have difficult conversations with families and/or carers. This requires a level of complexity of communication skills beyond those needed in regular therapeutic interactions (e.g. delivery of difficult news about a child's slow progress with therapy). Often these conversations are managed in a team situation. This simulation aims to equip allied health professionals with skills in how to effectively deliver difficult news to children's families in a team environment. Clinical specialists and educators may also find that they can adapt this simulation to suit differing clinical contexts (e.g. oncology or intensive care) or different paediatric contexts. It can be individually facilitated or co-facilitated. The simulation can be conducted in a multi-purpose room, a simulation centre or on a ward.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the simulation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the communication skills required in effectively delivering difficult news
2. Identify the key aspects of their own communication style
3. Demonstrate the communication skills required in effectively delivering difficult news.

Target Audience

Allied health professionals from a range of disciplines may find this simulation useful. In particular, the simulation is written to include qualified occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and speech pathologists who are working in multidisciplinary teams. Not all disciplines have been included in this scenario; however disciplines can be added or subtracted depending on local needs (e.g. psychology, dietetics, child life therapy, genetic counselling). Nursing and medical professionals working with children and families in multi-disciplinary teams may also find this simulation useful. This scenario has been written for allied health professionals already working in teams and ideally will be conducted with these teams in their natural work settings. The scenario, however, can be adapted in complexity depending on the learners' needs. For example:

- To increase complexity for more experienced staff, a range of family issues and behaviours could be introduced.
- To reduce complexity for undergraduate students, family issues and complex behaviours could be minimised, or the simulated patients could be briefed to make the emotional reactions less challenging.

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Simulation activity

In this simulation, participants are meeting with parents of a patient named Thomas to discuss their concerns and initiate a referral to the paediatrician. Prior to the meeting with Thomas' parents, participants meet briefly to prepare their approach with this family.

Thomas (not present at the meeting) is an 18 month old male child with global developmental delay including delayed motor, speech and language skills and continued feeding delays. The treating therapists suspect that Thomas has Cerebral Palsy. In the past, Thomas' parents have not accepted that Thomas may have developmental delays and have requested that therapists' reports are kept confidential from the child care centre that Thomas attends.

Participants will have access to patient medical notes. Using communication strategies presented in the education session preceding the simulation activity, participants will be expected to deliver the results of their clinical assessments to the parents, and manage the emotional reactions which may arise as a result of the discussion.

In this simulation, participants are divided into two groups. One group will participate in the simulation in their relevant clinical role, while the other group observes. Participants then engage in debriefing following the simulation. The two groups then swap roles and the simulation is repeated, again followed by group debriefing.

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Duration 4 hours

Faculty 1 x Facilitator
2 x Simulated parents (Michael and Anita)

Participants 6-8 participants from the disciplines of occupational therapy, physiotherapy, social work and speech pathology.

Authors

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Educators and clinicians who would like to offer this simulation can access the complete package on the **HETI website**. Supporting documentation includes:

- Simulation Template
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Participant Briefing Notes
- Simulated Parent Briefing Notes – Michael
- Simulated Parent Briefing Notes – Anita
- Sample Progress Notes for the Medical Record

Facilitators can print off copies and distribute the relevant documentation to faculty and participants.

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