

Facilitator Instructions for role play – Disclosing Medical Error

1. Give your instructions to the group (5 min.). This role play will be about how to handle discussions of medical error with patients.
2. Have learners pair up. One in each pair will play the role of the patient (Mr. T) and the other will play the role of physician (Dr. N). The setting will be Dr. N's office.
3. Give the instruction sheets to the learners. Ask them to read and prepare silently for several minutes. As they play their roles, they should try to stay roughly in character but take the conversation in the direction that seems most natural to them. When they are ready, they should begin the role play.
4. In their pairs, the learners will do the role play (10 minutes or less). You should observe and listen during this time. (Optional: It can be instructive to identify a pair who you think will be able to do the role play a second time for the rest of the group, who will observe this time.)
5. Lead the debriefing based on the questions below (20 -30 minutes).

Scenario: Mr. T has just been told he has a concerning nodule found incidentally on a chest CT. He is coming to see Dr. N in follow up. He will need referral to a specialist for further evaluation.

Dr. N has treated Mr. T for 5 years for hypertension. Three years ago an abdominal CT was ordered to evaluate pains Mr. T had. It was negative, and the pains resolved; but a small nodule was seen in some of the lung cuts of the CT. The radiologist suggested further imaging. Dr. N apparently overlooked this incidental finding and took no action. This oversight has resulted in some delay in evaluation of the nodule, and it will be difficult at this point to predict the potential impact for the patient.

Potential questions for the learners to address after the role play.

Precisely what does Dr. N tell the patient about what happened? Does this constitute a full disclosure in your opinion?

Does Dr. N accept responsibility for the error?

Does Dr. N explicitly apologize for this lapse?

If Dr. N apologizes, does the apology feel sincere? Are there any things that Dr. N says or does not say that make the apology seem less than completely sincere? Which elements of effective apology did Dr. N use (adequately acknowledge the offense, provide an honest explanation, express remorse, provide offer of help or other action to repair the relationship)?

What is the body language of each person saying, and does it match the words? If the body language and words don't match, which is more powerful?

Are there any points where Dr. N seems more certain than is warranted or, on the contrary, overly vague or evasive?

What are the apparent emotional responses of Mr. T and Dr. N? What other emotions might you expect in these kinds of situations? How would you handle these emotions?