

Dealing with an demanding obstructive relative

Very often the behaviour of relatives can create problems for either the patient or for us, as professionals, as we care for the patient. Examples are

- ◆ Relatives not wanting to give up treatment, even though the patient wants to
- ◆ Relatives being demanding of attention and care
- ◆ Relatives not wanting us to see the patient alone
- ◆ Relatives complaining that care is inadequate

When dealing with an 'obstructive relative' key strategies are:

- ◆ Ask to talk to the relative by themselves
- ◆ Explore the relatives understanding of the patient's situation
- ◆ Explore the impact of the illness and having to care for a loved one for the relative i.e. their perceptions and feelings about the patient's situation
- ◆ Acknowledge openly the behaviour that is causing the problem
- ◆ Identify the reasons for the relative's behaviour, or the basis for their belief
- ◆ Empathise with the relative about the difficulty of the situation, and the validity of their motives

Depending of the context one of the following strategies may then be appropriate

- ◆ Confront the reality of the situation e.g. More treatment will not make a difference (breaking bad news)
- ◆ Acknowledge the complaint and apologise for the event occurring if appropriate. Respond by negotiating a way forward

Move on

- ◆ Explore the relatives reactions to the above
 - Acknowledge emotions
 - Explore concerns