

ICMNRO Guidance: Case Based Discussion - Good Reflection Demonstrated

One of the cases in my portfolio is about an elderly gentleman who was admitted to the medical admissions unit with a possible pneumonia. I was the F2 doctor who admitted him and both he and his wife were extremely anxious. I really felt for them and they reminded me of my own Mum and Dad. This case stands out for me for many reasons but mainly because I got so upset. The whole experience and my response to it really surprised me but the way I was treated by the ward staff was amazing.

This gentleman had been a miner in his younger days. His chest had always been bad and he had been diagnosed with COPD 20 years ago at the age of 52. He stopped smoking at that time and tried to keep himself as fit and active as possible. His children had grown up, he was a Grandad and was to become a great grandad for the first time in a few months. He was very excited about this. He took great delight in telling me all about it and I began to look forward to seeing him each day, even though he was eventually moved to the respiratory ward. When my week on MAU finished I was able to see "Bob", as he had asked me to call him, for the first time in several days during our morning ward round. He was being discharged home the following day and I was so pleased for him but he didn't look happy at all. I went back to see him at the end of the round and sat with him. He had been diagnosed with lung cancer which was inoperable. He had been given 6 months at the most and although he would probably live to see his first great grandchild he was likely to develop a lot of pain because of his bone metastases. I was so shocked I didn't know what to say so I quickly gave my apologies and left. I didn't know where to turn and was in a state of panic and so ran into the toilet. I almost ran into sister which just made the situation worse as she was always telling me off for my illegible handwriting and not filling out prescription charts correctly. I collapsed in a heap and cried and the only thing I could think of was that here was yet another thing that sister could add to my 360 feedback. However what happened next was truly amazing. She got down on the floor with me and held me as I sobbed. I was so embarrassed and just wanted to go and hide but she said we would go and talk when I had calmed down. She took me into her office and I slowly explained what had happened.

When I had admitted Bob he confessed that he thought he might have cancer but that he was too scared to admit it to anyone and hadn't even discussed it with his wife. The fact that he had spoken about it to me made me realise how patients still look up to doctors and made me feel proud and important. I held his hand as he told me his story and after I had examined him and looked at his x-ray I reassured him that it was just a bad chest infection and he'd be fine after a course of antibiotics and some physio. I thought I was doing the right thing and there was no one senior to discuss it with as they were all busy elsewhere. I had seen patients with pneumonia many times and was confident about my diagnosis. I felt I had let Bob down but sister assured me this wasn't the case.

Thinking about it now I could have spoken to the sister in charge that day as they are very experienced. I know I would have got some good advice. I perhaps shouldn't have got

quite so emotionally involved with the patient and kept a degree of professionalism in our relationship but I did feel as though I was caring for my Dad. I have learned that it isn't wrong to cry and sometimes this is acceptable in front of patients as we are only human after all, but I need to be mature about both life and death and to expect it. I still feel confident about my clinical skills and appreciate that I will continue to develop these. I hadn't realised that there were non-clinical skills that I needed to work on. I showed compassion but I think I need to learn to manage this to make me more productive. What I could have done is spent time with Bob talking about his fears, as we did have a good rapport and I am sure he would have benefitted from that. Even if I couldn't answer all his questions I could have found out for him from others. This is what I think I will do next time and then look back at this and see how much I have learned just by thinking things through.