Basic tips for managing communication with families and patients who are deteriorating, aimed at helping colleagues heavily occupied with the emergency

In the case of a CONSCIOUS PATIENT

Tips for communicating with the PATIENT

With the patient
Avoid sentences such as

“There is nothing more we can do for you.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll die quietly and peacefully with these drugs.”

“These drugs will let you die without suffering.”

“You must be strong/brave for your family.”

“You’ll see, our treatment will stop you being anxious or scared.”

With the patient
RECOMMENDED expressions

“Good morning Mr/Mrs/Ms (address the person by name), I am Doctor... (introduce yourself by name)

...we’re doing our best to look after you and take care of you...”

“I understand that this is an emotional time, anyone would be scared/anxious (repeat the term used by the person)... ...it is normal to be worried and scared.”

“We are doing our best to help you and make sure you don’t suffer.”

“I am very sorry that you cannot have your loved ones around you, but as you can see, you are here with us, you are not alone, we will stay with you.”

“Even though your family cannot stay in the ward, they are very close. They call every day to find out how you are, and we make sure we talk to them regularly.”
In the case of a CONSCIOUS OR UNCONSCIOUS PATIENT
Tips for communicating with the FAMILY

When on the phone to the family
Avoid sentences such as

DO NOT introduce yourself in an impersonal way:

“Good evening, I’m the doctor on duty.”

Never refer to the patient by saying:
“A patient in this pathological stage…”

DO NOT say that the patient is worse in a way that is too direct or blunt by using sentences such as:

“There is nothing more we can do for your father/mother/etc.”

“Don’t worry, your father/mother/etc. will die peacefully with these drugs.”

“These drugs will let him or her die without suffering.”

When on the phone to the family
RECOMMENDED expressions

Introduce yourself by your full name and role:

“I’m so sorry that due to this awful situation we cannot meet in person to talk about your father/mother/wife/etc.”

Try to provide information gradually, if possible, using simple language:

“We understand your anxiety/fear/desperation... it is perfectly reasonable.”

Provide information gradually:

“We have done everything in our power for you/your father/mother/brother/sister at this very difficult time...”

“...Unfortunately, medicine has its limits and now with Mr/Mrs/Ms (name the patient) we have reached that limit.”

“...his/her condition is deteriorating... We are so sorry. At the moment we are doing our best to prevent any suffering...”

“...he/she will be settled and won’t feel any pain...”

“...he/she will be settled at the end and won’t feel any pain in the final moments of his/her life...”