

CASE STUDY 1: How to Break Bad News

The patient, Mrs Maryanne C, a 54 year-old woman, was admitted to hospital for a day procedure to remove a suspicious lump in her right breast.

Mr Smithers, the surgeon performed an excision biopsy on Mrs C. earlier that day and he arranged for her to return to you, her GP, in your surgery to hear the results of the pathology. Mr Smithers rang to inform you that the biopsy showed malignant cells and due to an emergency procedure has had to leave breaking the news to you.

Mr C. has left work early to be with his wife and has accompanied her to your surgery. Both are clearly anxious.

What steps would you take before breaking the bad news to Mr and Mrs C.?

What would you do when Mr and Mrs C. become upset?

Write down some examples of the phrases you would use.

Mr C. becomes angry at the news and asks what you are going to do about it and how quickly you can take the cancer out. Write down your responses.

How would you react when Mrs Connors asks how long she has to live? What would you say?

What follow-up and support would you offer the C's?
