

# Practical Tips on Breaking Bad News in Obstetric Ultrasound

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## Preparation;- Before the ultrasound examination:

Is the clinical room clean and tidy? The patient will remember this experience forever.

Ensure privacy and reduce the risk of interruptions.

Consider the need for a second opinion – is another qualified member of staff available?

Informed; read the clinical referral form, review previous ultrasound imaging and blood results, and confirm history with patient.

Inform the patient that you will be quiet whilst you initially scan before you explain the findings.

## During the ultrasound examination:

Once you are  
certain of your  
findings

Pause and think before talking - the patient will remember what you say forever.

Face the patient and talk directly to them rather than to colleagues or trainees.

Give the patient a warning that difficult news is coming.

Show empathy, we cannot change the pregnancy outcome, but we can demonstrate sympathy and compassion.

Be honest, give basic information using simple terminology, don't use terms "non-viable" or 'abortion' to describe a miscarriage.

Don't minimise the loss to the patient.

Talk slowly, pause, give time for the patient to take on board the news.

If the scan shows a pregnancy smaller than dates, check details without implying that the dates given are wrong.

Be honest; if you cannot give an immediate definitive answer, tell this to the patient.

Don't give false reassurance to make the patient feel better.

Assess patient's understanding, shock and distress can make it difficult to focus. You may need to repeat important points.

Give the patient a chance to ask questions or express their feelings.

Every patient is different, try to assess how much information each patient wants to know or see on the screen.

If a second member of staff is required to confirm the findings, explain to the patient before you leave the room, minimising the time that the patient is left alone.

## After the ultrasound examination:

Summarise - confirm that the patient understands the results and what will happen next.

If possible, give the patient time to digest information in private, offer them a "quiet" room.

Check if the patient needs to call anyone for support, particularly if unaccompanied.

Hand the patient over to appropriate staff, or ensure that they have the correct contact details or follow up appointments if leaving the department.