**Practical Tips for Delivering Difficult News in Obstetric Ultrasound**

**Lorraine Walsh** MEd, PgDip, DMU, DCR

### 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?
- Be informed; read the clinical referral form, review previous ultrasound imaging and blood test results. Confirm history with patient and assess if you need an interpreter present.
- Inform the patient that you will be quiet whilst you initially scan before you explain the findings.

### During the ultrasound examination: Once you are ready to discuss 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 empathy 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 or explain in a different way.
- 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.
- Refer patient to appropriate staff, or ensure that they have the correct contact details or follow up appointments if leaving the department.