

Unrealistic expectations

To have identified that a patient or relative is unrealistic, the patient's belief about the possible outcomes of the illness, treatment or length of prognosis must first have been assessed.

To help someone who has 'unrealistic expectations' it is vital to establish what has happened and why the person is unrealistic. There are a number of reasons why a patient or relative may be unrealistic.

- ◆ They have never been properly informed.
- ◆ They are unrealistic about the significance of the information they have been given.
- ◆ Clinging onto false hope.
- ◆ In denial

What ever the situation is, the key is to assess **WHY** the patient believes what they do.

So:

- ◆ Use the patient's cues to **explore** the patient's perception of their situation.
- ◆ Gently **challenge unrealistic beliefs** about outcomes, by
 - Confronting any inconsistencies in the story
 - Looking for 'windows of worry' about the possible outcomes e.g. at night they may worry despite not worrying during the day.
- ◆ Establish whether the patient is ill informed and needs to be told bad news
- ◆ Break bad news (see section on giving significant information)