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Published in:
British Journal of Surgery

DOI:
[10.1093/bjs/znab259.594](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjs/znab259.594)

Published: 12/10/2021

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Olukoya, O., Ishak, P., Ali, A., & McLaughlan, D. (2021). Does the SPIKES protocol and formal teaching increase clinician confidence when breaking bad news during the COVID pandemic? *British Journal of Surgery*, 108, [znab259.594]. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjs/znab259.594>

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This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in British Journal of Surgery. The version of record is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjs/znab259.594>

Does the SPIKES protocol and formal teaching increase clinician confidence when breaking bad news during the COVID pandemic?

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BACKGROUND

Breaking bad news is often a daunting and complex task that we must all perform as part of our clinical duties. Given the current climate with the coronavirus, this task has unfortunately become an even bigger part of the day to day practice of many of us.

AIM

To establish how confident clinicians felt they were at breaking bad news, their familiarity with the SPIKES protocol and if they had a consistent approach they employed. Additionally, to ascertain if formal training in this, at any stage, corresponded to increased confidence with this task.

METHOD

A questionnaire was distributed to doctors of all grades, primarily within University Hospital Ayr. The questionnaire asked the responders how confident they felt at breaking bad news, how frequently they had to break bad news in an average month, if they had had any formal training in breaking bad news, and their familiarity with the SPIKES protocol.

RESULTS

There were 58 responses. 60.4% had to break bad news 2 or more times in an average month. 86.2% had received formal training in breaking bad news. 60.3% felt confident or very confident at breaking bad news. 53.4% had a consistent strategy and 58.6% were aware of the SPIKES protocol. 69% expressed they would like additional teaching with the SPIKES protocol.

CONCLUSION

Formal training does not guarantee knowledge of the SPIKES protocol or a consistent approach but has some impact on perceived confidence with the task. This task is, however, one most feel requires continued training to perform well.

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