

Skills practice scenario 5 - recurrent breast cancer

Remember the 'patient' and 'professional' scripts need to be presented on separate folded sheets for the trio group work. It doesn't matter if details are changed, e.g. gender or age of 'patient' or title of 'professional', if that works better for the group.

Patient - Mrs White

63 years old, metastatic breast cancer, completed third course of palliative chemotherapy but at recent OP appointment, your fears that the disease was again active (you have been breathless on minimal exertion and have had increasing severe steady back pain especially at night) were confirmed with enlarging pulmonary and spinal metastases. Offered 4th line chemo but without much hope or enthusiasm by oncologist – 'he seemed to need to do something' but would not look you in the eye and did not answer when you asked, 'Is it worth it?'

You now have increasing pain and are frightened of what is ahead. Your husband George's response is 'you don't want to worry' You're unhappy about the prospect of further chemotherapy as you felt so awful during last course but feel you would be letting down your doctors and family if you do not have it. You have lots of unspoken fears and worries; you remember your mother having great amount of pain when she died 35 years ago with cancer, also having awful side effects from the morphine when she was given it a few days before she died.

You have so many questions – some only partly formed – when you go to see your usual GP. Probably the most important one is 'is this is the end, am I dying?'. If so how long have I got? What will it be like? Will I be able to cope with the pain? Will I have to go back into hospital? What should she say to her daughter Penny in Canada? And does she have to have this awful chemotherapy?



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Professional – Dr Bruce

Poor Mrs White – she's been worried about having cancer for years and now she has it and it is progressing fast. Pity her daughter is so far away in Canada. Still the hospital has written to say they are offering a further chemo course – though they don't have hope of much benefit.

