

DIFFICULT COMMUNICATIONS WHEN ENGLISH IS NOT YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE:

Voices from ICU Consultants

A Quality Improvement Project



BACKGROUND

Difficult conversations in ICU require clarity, empathy and trust. For consultants whose first language is not English, linguistic nuances, accent and cultural interpretation can add additional challenges and may impact family understanding and acceptance.



AIM

To explore the challenges faced by non-native English speaking ICU consultants during difficult conversations, identify common themes and practical strategies to improve **communication, confidence and family acceptance.**



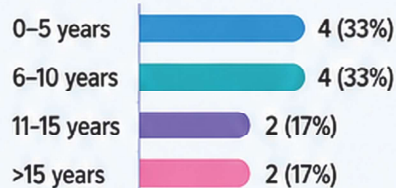
METHODS

- Local QIP – Qualitative study
- 12 ICU Consultants (non-native English speakers)
- 5 Semi-structured questions
- Thematic analysis of responses
- Findings presented at the Local Difficult Conversations Study Day

PARTICIPANTS (N = 12 Consultants)



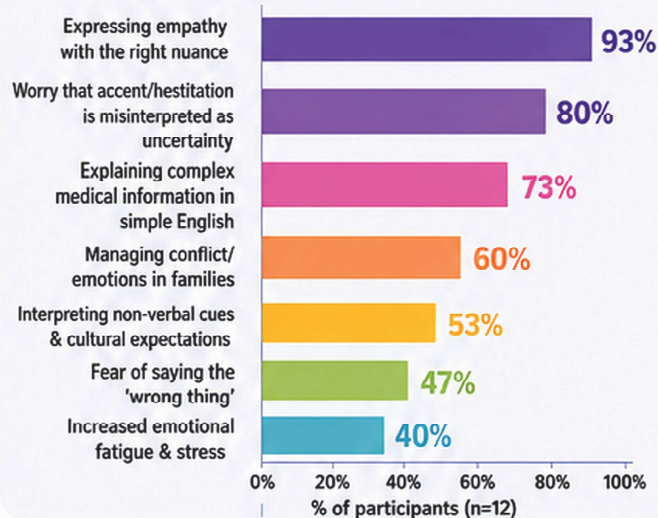
Years of ICU Experience



THE 5 QUESTIONS

- What are the biggest challenges you face in difficult conversations?
- How do families generally respond to these conversations?
- How does this impact you personally and professionally?
- What strategies or support do you use to overcome these challenges?
- What support or training would be most helpful?

KEY RESULTS – THEMES IDENTIFIED



“ VOICES FROM OUR CONSULTANTS

- “ I worry they don't see my hesitation as thinking, but as not knowing.”
- “ The medical words are one thing, but the emotions in their eyes are harder to read.”
- “ I prepare a lot before meetings and use very simple language.”
- “ Families are kind, but sometimes ask for a senior to repeat everything.”
- “ Being multilingual helps me connect culturally.”



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STRATEGIES THAT HELP



WHAT THIS MEANS

- Language is more than words – it impacts trust, understanding and acceptance.
- Non-native English speaking consultants face unique but addressable challenges.
- Targeted support can improve confidence, communication quality and family experience.
- Our diversity is our strength – empathy, cultural awareness and resilience are powerful assets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Formal communication training & simulation
- Mentorship & peer discussion groups
- Protected time for reflective practice
- Access to professional interpreters early
- Constructive feedback & debriefing opportunities
- Celebrate diversity and build a psychologically safe culture

CONCLUSION

Difficult conversations are hard for everyone, but even harder when English is not our first language. With the right support, training and understanding, we can communicate with greater clarity, compassion and confidence – and help families feel heard, respected and supported.

*Communication is a bridge.
Let's build it together.*

