

Undertakes appropriate examination and tests

Green – Performs an appropriate examination based on the likelihood of disease

Red – Performs either no examination at all, or an indiscriminate examination which fails to test hypotheses

Green – Performs an examination that is fluent and competent

Red – Performs an examination that is incompetent and/or incomplete

Green – Interprets examination findings correctly

Red – Fails to interpret examination findings correctly

Green – Offers measured and appropriate tests that serve the diagnostic process

Red – Does not offer necessary tests or offers inappropriate tests that may alarm the patient

About this task

Examinations (and tests) can be absent, or too brief, or too lengthy. Long and unfocused examinations waste time and may actually impair the hypothesis testing process.

Start to think of examinations (and tests) in the same way as you think about taking a history - their role is to rule in or rule out particular diagnoses and you should only perform an examination if it will help in this process (or reassure the patient about a particular concern) So the trainee needs to:

- Make a decision concerning the need for focussed examination/tests
- If examination/tests are needed to test diagnostic hypotheses, choice is focussed appropriately
- Obtain consent
- Perform a slick and competent examination/tests

Audio consultations

The main formal examination type in an audio consultation is the mental state examination. However, you can often gain valuable information from listening carefully to the patient over the phone.

For example, you can gain much information about a child based on their degree of movement and activity. For an adult, respiratory distress, respiratory rate, muscle strength, balance etc. are all valuable examination findings.

If you need more examination information, then clearly the next step is to bring them in to the surgery for a formal examination.

If you have been sent a photograph beforehand, you also have the option of describing what you see on the photograph and how the findings might rule in or out serious disease (or not).

Educational Activities

Activity 1: Review a series of your consultations. In how many of these consultations is there evidence of your examination/tests helping hypothesis testing?

Activity 2: Using a reliable GP-based website, compare your own examination style to the examination done by an experienced practitioner. Could your examination be improved?

Activity 3: When you review your video consultations, ask yourself - “How effective is this examination in clarifying the diagnosis?” Think particularly:

- Is the examination/test necessary?
- Is there a more effective examination or test that would help to clarify the diagnosis?

Activity 4: Now practice this approach in your future consultations and review some of these consultations with your trainer. Do you feel the accuracy of your diagnostic process has improved?

Audio consultations.

Review a series of your audio consultations. Could you obtain more information about the patient by judicious use of questions and asking the patient to perform simple tasks? In each consultation, have you *maximised* the information you have obtained from the limited examination that you and the patient can do over the telephone?

Reflective Exercises

Exercise 1: Think about how you prepare the patient for the examination? You have a legal duty to obtain informed consent before you “lay hands” on the patient, but you have an ethical duty to minimise any distress caused by the examination. Think how you might do this, particularly in terms of:

- Explanation of what needs to be done
- Permission seeking
- Whether a chaperone is needed (or not)

Related interpersonal skills

Practicing and developing the following interpersonal skills will allow the task of ‘Undertakes appropriate examination and tests’ to be achieved more effectively:

- Verbalises thinking
- Seeks informed consent

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