

## **Instruction on Taking a Medical History**

Suggest watching these two 15-minute videos:

Watch this instructional video first

History Taking (1-3) Clinical Skills 101 – TheAnatomyRoom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ34QYhtBcY>

Then this practice example video:

Clinical History Taking (with Patient Example) - NurseLedClinics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsjKcQUsQY8>

In addition, read this written outline of what you need to cover in a patient interview

- 1) Introductions. Introduce yourself, say who you are and what you will be doing over the next 15 minutes (mention that you are basic science, not medical students, so you are just learning about medical problems). Say that one will be conducting the interview, and the other will be researching and possibly suggesting questions to ask. Say that you will not be examining the patient but at the end may be able to suggest possible diagnoses and tests to reach that diagnosis
- 2) Presenting complaint. After the introduction ask a general question: so why have you come to see the doctor? They will respond with a general symptom such as a fever and/or pain. Follow this up with relevant questions. The best way is to ask open ended questions allowing the patient to fill the gaps. However, in practice, with time constraints you may not have time to do that so you may have to ask more specific questions, particularly if during the interview the patient has not already answered an important question spontaneously (it is realistic to have just 15 minutes for an interview)
- 3) The questions depend on the nature of the initial complaint. For example, for a fever, how long has it gone on for, has the patient had shaking attacks (rigors), and then do they have other relevant symptoms such as a cough with sputum, if so what color sputum, breathlessness, pain passing urine, abdominal or flank pain, headaches etc. Sick contact, recent travel overseas. For pain, how severe is it (on a 1-10 scale) at its worst, how long has it gone on like, what does the pain feel like (e.g.: constant, comes and goes in waves, cramp like, sharp (if so, what does sharp mean: knife like or just very severe), where the pain is and does it radiate anywhere else. Then relevant associated symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea (and if so, how often a day, is it watery, have you been on antibiotics recently).
- 4) Medications (prescribed and over the counter, including for this complaint)
- 5) Past Medical History. Then ask the patient about their past medical history. Do you have high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease? Have you had any surgery, or other illnesses? Or a woman of the right age, is it possible you are pregnant, are you taking contraceptive measures.
- 6) Family & Social History. Are you married, do you live alone (this is important for somebody who is sick being sent home from hospital and helps you understand the context of their problems)? Do you smoke? Depending on the initial complaint, for example “pain passing urine”, it would be appropriate to ask if you are sexually active or have new sexual partners.

- 7) Systems Review. Go through systems: respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, neurological if they have not been covered before, you may pick up a relevant symptom you had not thought of before that is relevant to their complaint.
- Once you are done with the interview, spend a few minutes putting it together to make a structured history which would include the presenting complaint, details about the presenting complaint and relevant associated symptoms, relevant medication, relevant past, family, and social history.
  - Based on this come up with a differential diagnosis list of 3-4 conditions in order of likelihood
  - Think about what tests you might do that would help you reach a final diagnosis
  - Think about how you would manage the patient before you reach the final diagnosis, and then once that diagnosis has been reached
  - In the post interview meeting, we will ask you to summarize the history of the presenting complaint (HPC) and for the differential diagnosis. We will give you results of tests you ask for and then allow you to reach a final diagnosis and formulate a plan for the patient.