



A Practical Guide to Clinical Medicine

A comprehensive physical examination and clinical education site for medical students and other health care professionals

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Outpatient Clinics: Keys For Successful Participation

All components of patient care are being shifted from the in-hospital setting to outpatient clinics. Medical student education has subsequently changed to more accurately reflect this current state of practice. As such, you will all undoubtedly spend a significant portion of the next few years (as well as time during your residency training) seeing patients/learning in the outpatient setting. In order to be successful, you will need to adapt to this unique environment. The pace in clinic is less forgiving than on the inpatient services. In the hospital, you can always go back later to talk with the patient. Outpatients, however, are scheduled to be seen in a finite period of time, with little consideration given for the chaos that can occur when visits overrun their allotted slots. What sort of impact does this have on you as a student? While you will not be directly subjected to the pressures created by limited time and high patient volume, the same does not hold true for your preceptor. By extension, then, organization and time management will affect the quality of your experience, as measured by the amount of time spent with the preceptor, teaching which occurs, and number of patients seen.

How then do you learn to function efficiently in clinic? Preparation is key. Most patients attending outpatient clinics have been seen previously in the healthcare system. Important information about the patient is therefore frequently contained within the computer system, old charts, etc. In order to make best use of your time, you need to be aware of this information. I call this process "previewing" the patient and use the accompanying preview sheet (at end of section) to collect data and prepare for the visit. When participating in a clinic, try the following:

1. Get to the clinic as early as possible so that you will have time to talk with the preceptor about your role/their specific expectations for you. Assuming that you will be performing the initial patient

Practical Guide To Clinical Medicine

Ying Liu



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