

# BRIEF CONTENTS

## UNIT 1

### Foundations of Nursing Health Assessment

- 1 The Nurse's Role in Health Assessment 3
- 2 The Health History and Interview 22
- 3 Techniques, Safety, and Infection Control 51
- 4 Documentation and Interprofessional Communication 71

## UNIT 2

### General Examinations

- 5 Vital Signs and General Survey 93
- 6 Pain Assessment 129
- 7 Nutritional Assessment 152
- 8 Assessment of Developmental Stages 180
- 9 Mental Health, Violence, and Substance Use Disorder 205
- 10 Cultural Assessment 236

## UNIT 3

### Regional Examinations

- 11 Skin, Hair, and Nails Assessment 261
- 12 Head and Neck Assessment, With Vision and Hearing Basics 312
- 13 Eye Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice 338
- 14 Ear Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice 374
- 15 Nose, Sinuses, Mouth, and Throat Assessment 402

- 16 Thorax and Lung Assessment 445

- 17 Heart and Neck Vessels Assessment 483

- 18 Peripheral Vascular and Lymphatic Assessment 523

- 19 Breast and Axillae Assessment 556

- 20 Abdominal Assessment 585

- 21 Musculoskeletal Assessment 624

- 22 Neurological and Mental Status Assessment 673

- 23 Male Genitalia and Rectal Assessment 722

- 24 Female Genitalia and Rectal Assessment 761

## UNIT 4

### Special Populations and Foci

- 25 Pregnancy 807

- 26 Newborns and Infants 840

- 27 Children and Adolescents 878

- 28 Older Adults 909

## UNIT 5

### Putting It All Together

- 29 Assessment of the Hospitalized Adult 939

- 30 Head-to-Toe Assessment of the Adult 959

Appendix A: Answers to Review Questions 987

Appendix B: Answers to Next Generation NCLEX  
Style Questions 1005

Illustration Credit List 1035

Index 1039

# ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

## Learning Objectives

These objectives give readers direction and present the most important goals upon chapter completion.

## Progressive Case Studies (Woven Throughout)

Each chapter presents a patient with a health concern corresponding to the chapter topic. Over the course of the chapter, the patient situation changes, and the nurse intervenes using a clinical judgment approach. Case study features woven throughout each chapter include Next Generation NCLEX (NGN) style questions and critical thinking challenges to better prepare learners for practice. NGN case study item types (multiple response, highlighting, cloze, drag and drop, and matrix/grid) test student clinical judgment. Cases are culturally representative, age distributed, and gender inclusive—designed for today's healthcare environment.

## Structure and Function

This section summarizes anatomy and physiology. If students remember organ function, the assessments they are learning make better sense. The section is updated with useful real-world “clinical significance” applications to answer the question, “so what?”

## Subjective Cues

Before beginning the history, the nurse prioritizes urgent and emergency assessments because an immediate intervention may be indicated. The nurse then identifies common signs and symptoms. Teaching and health promotion activities are suggested for high-risk areas. *Healthy People 2030* objectives link individual assessments with health equity issues to improve health and well-being for populations.

## Objective Cues

Evidence-based techniques allow the nurse to arrive at normal and abnormal findings. Recurring checklists differentiate registered nurse (RN) from advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) level practice. Detailed descriptions of documentation allow the learner to develop accurate medical vocabulary for each technique. Safety is highlighted so the reader can see key alerts easily.

## Clinical Judgment

The nurse uses the nursing process in a changing patient situation and presents a high-level clinical plan of care. The nurse communicates nursing thinking and clinical judgment in a written progress note (SOAP) and in a verbal SBAR format. Key diagnostic and laboratory testing results are used to support a diagnosis or hypothesis.

## Key Points: You've Got This!

Key points of the chapter are summarized as reinforcement that the student has understood the most important information.

## Review Questions

These questions are one more way to reinforce learning; they are consistent with the objectives at the beginning of the chapter.

## Tables of Abnormal Findings

These tables illustrate common abnormalities related to the assessment, with compare-and-contrast information on key data points. Photos of significant abnormal findings are an excellent resource.



Fourth Edition



# Nursing Health Assessment

A Clinical Judgment Approach

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## INSPIRATION

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*The most important practical advice that can be given to nurses is to teach them what to observe.*

—Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not*, 1860

We truly hope that this text lays out real-life situations so that nurses understand the importance of observation, with subjective and objective assessment as the foundation on which all nursing is based. This clinical judgment approach provides support for high-quality, safe nursing care.

## DEDICATION

---

To the students, whose effort and ability allow me the privilege of serving as a guide and mentor during their education.

To nurses, as the recent pandemic has highlighted the importance and direct impact nurses have on individuals, communities, populations, and the health of our world. Nurses are on the front lines because they are the most trusted caring profession.

To my parents, Jack and Gwen Erickson; my siblings and their spouses, Mike and Dianna Erickson, Kathy and Mark Keithly, and Alan and Marla Erickson; and my children, Anna, Chris, and Penelope Megrey; and Eric Jensen.

—Sharon Jensen

Thank you:

To all the nurses who have come before me and those who will come after me. Nurses are the backbone of the health-care system. Their strength lies in a persistent advocacy for patients.

To Sharon Jensen, whose belief in me provided the opportunity for me to participate in this wonderful text.

To my mom and dad, Bob and Roberta Godin, who inspired me to reach further than I could dream; my sister Donna Melanson, my best friend; my sons Bryant, Nate, and Aaron, for their belief and encouragement; my future daughter-in-law Rebecca, the newest nurse in the family; and my husband Ed, for his constant support in all that I do.

—Debra Servello

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*Nursing Health Assessment: A Clinical Judgment Approach*, Fourth Edition, has a revised subtitle to reflect a modern approach to both nursing education and clinical nursing practice. The goal is to combine the most successful elements of traditional health assessment texts with innovative elements to help students apply knowledge. Clinical judgment is the outcome of critical thinking and decision-making. It is a process that uses nursing knowledge to observe and assess situations, identify a prioritized patient concern, and generate the best possible solutions. The nurse uses evidence-based knowledge, skill, and practice to deliver safe patient care. New Next Generation NCLEX (NGN) style questions integrated throughout each chapter prepare students for the licensing exam and clinical practice.

The fourth edition has also been updated to include social determinants of health, to incorporate nonbiased language, and to reflect current infection and source control measures. Diagnoses in the text employ language from the International Classification for Nursing Practice (ICNP), which provides a wide-ranging, understandable reference terminology that can adapt to multiple purposes. In addition, the text uses reliable and valid assessment tools to support safety for patients and providers alike.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

---

Unit 1, *Foundations of Nursing Health Assessment*, provides in-depth coverage of the basic components to set the stage for nursing health assessment. The rest of the text builds on the material in this first unit. Unit 1 includes the nurse's role in assessment, interview and health history, infection control, patient and provider safety, exam techniques, documentation, and communication with other health professionals.

Unit 2, *General Examinations*, presents assessments that apply to all content areas. These topics reflect the holistic nature of nursing health assessment. Topics in Unit 2 include vital signs, general survey, pain, nutrition, development, mental health, violence, substance abuse, and culture. *Healthy People 2030* goals are included, which reflect the objectives, needs, and inequities in today's healthcare environment.

Unit 3, *Regional Examinations*, is the main body of the textbook. It presents individual chapters on assessment of the key areas of the body, including the skin, heart, thorax, abdomen, and neurological system. Unit 3 generally proceeds head to toe in a body system format, walking the learner through details of each system. The material focuses primarily on adults (health assessment of younger patients is covered in Unit 4).

Unit 4, *Special Populations and Foci*, presents assessments for pregnant people, newborns and infants, children and adolescents, and older adults.

Unit 5, *Putting It All Together*, reinforces the book's previous learning. The chapter on the hospitalized adult includes contemporary issues, such as focus on falls, skin breakdown, hospital acquired infections, and sepsis. The head-to-toe chapter outlines how to complete a comprehensive head-to-toe examination for an adult. The hospitalized adult chapter is written with the RN in mind, whereas the head-to-toe chapter is for the APRN.

## CHAPTER ORGANIZATION AND FEATURES

### PROGRESSIVE CASE STUDIES

Progressive case study material is woven throughout every chapter and is reinforced with Next Generation NCLEX (NGN) style questions. These questions are formatted similar to NGN item types (multiple response, highlighting, cloze, drag and drop, and matrix/grid) and have corresponding answers in Appendix B. From the beginning to the end of the content presentation, readers follow a patient's story and are challenged to apply their reading to the unfolding scenario. The case study reinforces the six steps of the clinical judgment model: recognize cues, analyze cues, prioritize hypotheses, generate solutions, take action, and evaluate outcomes. There is also a progress note for each case with critical thinking prompts. The NGN and critical thinking questions are progressive. (For your convenience, a list of these case studies, along with their location in the book, appears in the "Case Studies in This Book" section later in this front matter.)

The seven parts of the case study are as follows:

- **Top Patient Findings: What Matters Most?** The reader meets the patient and identifies cues with an NGN style drag-and-drop question. Critical thinking questions link the patient to what will be learned in the chapter.



### CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

#### Top Patient Findings: What Matters Most?

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

Ms. Maria Ortiz (prefers Ms. Ortiz, pronouns she/her/hers), a 52-year-old Mexican American woman, has a follow-up appointment related to type 2 diabetes, which was diagnosed 2 weeks ago during an annual physical assessment. Her primary language is Spanish. Although she speaks English well, she has difficulty understanding complex medical terminology. Ms. Ortiz has been married for 30 years, and her three grown children live nearby.

Ms. Ortiz is 1.52 m (5 ft) tall, weighs 75 kg (165 lb), and has a body mass index (BMI) of 32.2. She eats a diet high in fats and starches. Her blood glucose levels at home have been elevated. She is otherwise healthy. Current vital signs are temperature 36.5°C (97.7°F) tympanic (ear route), right radial (wrist) pulse 82 beats/min, respirations 16 breaths/min, and blood pressure (BP) 138/92 mm Hg right arm. Medications include an oral hypoglycemic to lower blood sugar and a daily vitamin.

- Identify the top four patient findings that will require follow-up.

Patient Findings	Top Four Findings
Diagnosed 2 weeks ago with diabetes	
Married for 30 years	
BMI 32.2	
Elevated blood glucose	
Right radial pulse 82 beats/min	
BP 138/92 mm Hg right arm	

- **Collecting Subjective Data: Where Do I Start?** These displays provide examples of effective communication with patients in challenging situations, such as communication with those who are crying, have cognitive impairment, or pose ethical issues. Critical thinking questions at the end of each display pull out important issues. This part of the case uses a cloze (drop-down style) NGN style item type.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Collecting Subjective Data: Where Do I Start? (Second Conversation)

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

In this second conversation and home visit with Mr. Rowan, the nurse is continuing the conversation. Mr. Rowan did not like taking his medication. He does want to stay at home, but his dementia is increasing. Critique the techniques below that the nurse is using during the assessment.

**Nurse:** Good morning, Mr. Rowan. It is nice to see you again. My name is Tom.

**Mr. Rowan:** Oh, yes ....

**Nurse:** I came here the other day to check on you. I work with Betsy. (Notices that Mr. Rowan is wearing the same clothes as before; now they are soiled. Hair is messy, and he is growing a beard.)

**Mr. Rowan:** Oh yes, Betsy. She's my friend.

**Nurse:** Yes, Betsy is the nurse who sees you. She checks on you and how you are doing. How are you today?

**Mr. Rowan:** Well, my head is feeling a little fuzzy (speaks slowly).

**Nurse:** It looks like you haven't shaved in a few days ....

**Mr. Rowan:** I'm OK—tell me your name again ... I am just growing a little beard.

**Nurse:** Tom. (Notices dirty pans on stove.)

**Mr. Rowan:** Well, I'd rather be home, but I can't live by myself anymore (pauses).

- Complete the following sentence by selecting the correct options from each list.

The priority problem for this patient is \_\_\_\_\_ (list 1) as evidenced by the patient's \_\_\_\_\_ (list 2).

#### List 1

increasing dementia  
poor personal hygiene  
negative self-image

#### List 2

head feeling fuzzy, forgetting name of nurse, dirty pans on stove  
having an unkempt beard, messy hair, dirty clothes  
states would rather be home, cannot live independently

- **Documenting Changing Findings: What Could It Mean?** This feature summarizes abnormal findings relevant to the case study patient in the physical examination: inspection, palpation, percussion, and auscultation. It uses an NGN style matrix item type.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Documenting Changing Findings: What Could It Mean?

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

**INSPECTION:** 54-year-old male appears to be stated age, in no acute distress. Alert and oriented, responds to questions appropriately. Appears slightly anxious due to concerns about fasting during Ramadan. Skin with pink undertones, erect posture, and breathing easily. No obvious deformities. Full range of motion in extremities, gait stable. Blood glucose today 168 mg/dl.

**PALPATION:** Hands warm to touch, handshake firm, no edema in feet or legs. Abdomen nontender, nondistended. Pulses equal in hands and feet.

**PERCUSSION:** Abdomen tympanic

**AUSCULTATION:** Blood pressure (BP) 152/78, heart rate and rhythm regular, lungs clear.

- For each finding below, check the appropriate box to indicate if the finding is consistent with anxiety, diabetes, or conflicting spiritual belief. Each finding may support more than one disease process.

Patient Findings	Anxiety	Diabetes	Conflicting Spiritual Beliefs
Concerns about fasting during Ramadan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blood glucose 168 mg/dl	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appears slightly anxious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BP 152/78	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: Each column must have at least one response selected.



- **Analyzing Changing Findings: Progress Note:** This feature focuses on documented summaries of findings related to the case in four areas: subjective data (S), objective data (O), analysis (A), and plan (P). The format follows the nursing process, with assessment as the first and most important step. A “Critical Thinking Challenge” poses questions about important concerns.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Analyzing Changing Findings: Progress Note

#### Nurse's Notes

The home health nurse has just completed the physical examination of Karen Pitoci, the 15-year-old girl with anorexia nervosa. Consider how Karen's subjective statements compare to the objective data collected during the assessment. Notice that the objective data include findings from several body systems.

**SUBJECTIVE:** “I’m still fat. I don’t want to eat because I won’t fit into my clothes anymore.” 24-hour diet recall: one serving of fruit, half yogurt, half sandwich with pickle, celery, carrots, salad, diet soda.

**OBJECTIVE:** 15-year-old female is thin and appears older than her age. Height 170.2 cm (67 in.). Temperature 36°C oral, pulse 68 beats/min, respiration 20 breaths/min, BP 108/66 mm Hg. Taking fewer than 500 calories/day orally. Weight increased 1.1 lb,

BMI 14.8, which is underweight. Ideal weight 125 lb, weighs 71% of ideal weight, moderate malnutrition. Skin pale and dry with some flaking. Appears distressed about eating. No edema, peripheral pulses strong. Nails brittle, skin very thin and dull. Wearing bandana, hair appears dull and thin. Eyes sunken with dark circles. Upper and lower extremities with full range of motion, muscle strength 5/5. Abdomen soft, concave, nondistended, nontender. Heart rate and rhythm regular. Lung sounds clear.

**ANALYSIS:** Impaired low nutritional intake related to anorexia nervosa.

**PLAN:** Continue to encourage nutritious foods with adequate calories and protein. Schedule a visit next week to evaluate weight. Refer to a dietitian for further counseling on food choices.

### Critical Thinking Challenge

- Describe relationships between Karen's vital signs, height and weight, and other body systems.
- Considering the subjective and objective data collected about food and fluid intake, what treatable complications will you assess Karen for?
- How does the nurse collaborate with a psychotherapist, family, and team to promote successful interventions?

- **Interprofessional Collaboration: What Can I Do?** This unique feature describes provider roles to coordinate referrals and advocate for resources. The feature shows how to organize details using the SBAR framework: Situation, Background, Analysis (or Assessment), and Recommendations. Knowledge is applied with an NGN style matrix item type that identifies priorities of indicated, contraindicated, and nonessential interventions.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Interprofessional Collaboration With the Provider: What Can I Do?

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

The nurse suspects that Ms. Murphy has a *C. albicans* infection in her mouth. Treatment requires a prescription medication. Therefore, the nurse will need to notify the primary care provider. Some tips for calling a provider include:

- Consider the timing of the call and if immediate or urgent. In this case, the issue is not life threatening so the contact can be left for daytime hours.
- Use the SBAR method: situation, background, assessment, and recommendation.
- Always have a set of vital signs and allergies, no matter what you are calling for.
- Pull up the latest blood work, most importantly the complete blood count (CBC) and basic metabolic panel. In this case, the white blood cell count may be requested.
- Have the current medication list available, along with the last administration of pertinent prn medications.
- Request direct order entry if possible. Always read back the order, even if the provider is in a hurry. Clarify orders before hanging up the phone.

The following conversation illustrates how the nurse organizes the data and makes recommendations about the patient's situation to the provider.

**SITUATION:** "I'm Jen Tsang, and I've been caring for Ms. Murphy today. She is an 89-year-old woman admitted 13 days ago with pneumonia."

**BACKGROUND:** "She's been on antibiotics for most of her stay here, which has been complicated with multiple infections and a 4-day stay in the ICU."

**ASSESSMENT:** "When I performed oral care on her today, I noticed a white coating on her tongue. Her tongue has cheesy, white patches that scrape off. Her posterior palate also has a white cheesy coating. Her tonsils are pink, smooth, and have white patches. They are 1+ in size. She also has dysphagia and weight loss of 4 kg."

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** "I think that she might have a *Candida* infection from the antibiotics and wonder if you could order a medication such as nystatin to swish and swallow in her mouth. She seems to be swallowing carefully without aspiration, so I don't think that we need a swallowing consult at this time. I will provide oral care and push fluids and continue to monitor her intake."

- For each potential nursing intervention, place a check mark in the appropriate column to specify whether the intervention is indicated, nonessential, or contraindicated for the care of the patient.

Potential Intervention	Indicated	Nonessential	Contraindicated
Obtain prescription for nystatin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Place on nothing by mouth status.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refer to dietitian for food preferences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: Each column must have only one response selected.

- **Plan the Care: What Will I Do?** A table shows how to bring all the elements of assessment together when arriving at a nursing diagnosis based on previous findings. The table includes goals, interventions, rationales, and outcome criteria. This section shows how assessment generates more questions, including “What Will I Do?” NGN style item types are similar to extended multiple response and hotspot highlighting.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Plan the Care: What Will I Do?

#### Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

The nurse will perform teaching, remind to get assistance for transfers, and set up environmental cues to remember to call for those transfers. Because Mr. Rossi is confused and his memory is poor, the nurse will need to take more initiative to remind him to keep his legs dependent and change position often. Frequent rounding is required. The nurse also initiates a referral to physical therapy about use of a walker and a daily walking program. After completing such interventions, the nurse will reassess and evaluate outcomes.

Diagnose	Plan Outcomes	Implement	Rationale	Evaluate Outcomes
Ineffective peripheral tissue perfusion (related to PAD)	Patient will state that pain, numbness, and reduced sensation are improved 2 weeks after starting therapy program.	Keep lower extremities in a dependent position. Monitor peripheral pulses. Provide walking activity twice daily. Obtain physical therapy consult. Observe gait, balance, strength.	Keeping legs in a dependent position uses gravity to assist blood flow toward the feet. Range of motion prevents loss of mobility. Walking programs stimulate improved arterial perfusion and prevent further loss of function.	Patient states that pain, numbness, and sensation remain about the same. He reports keeping his legs dependent except when in bed. Gait, balance, strength at baseline. Continue plan and reevaluate in another 2 weeks. Continue fall precautions.

- The nurse has received orders from the healthcare provider. Identify the three orders that the nurse should perform.

- Obtain physical therapy consult.
- Monitor peripheral pulses every 4 hours.
- Observe gait, balance, strength.
- Elevate lower extremities.

- **Evaluating Outcomes: Did It Help?** The last section of the clinical judgment case study provides the “take home” message to readers. By comparing the unfolding and final assessments against expected outcomes, the learner identifies if what they did benefited the patient. Similar to real life, not every patient improves, and more assessments and interventions are needed. Cases demonstrate the ongoing importance of assessment as a dynamic and continuous process. The patient involvement engages students in learning about nursing care as a process that requires clinical judgment. NGN style item types are similar to extended multiple response and hotspot highlighting.





## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Evaluating Outcomes: Did It Help?

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

Note how the nurse performed general and focused assessments in a timely manner, modified the care on the basis of normal versus abnormal findings, and determined the need for referrals and follow-up. There is always a need to reassess the patient on the basis of acuity. This is subject to a nurse's clinical judgment and assessments may have to be repeated several times if the patient is highly acute.

Exacerbation of the ulcerative colitis contributed to diarrhea; 5/10 pain; and increasing fatigue, anemia, bleeding, and risk for volume deficit and infection. The physical examination showed 500 ml of dark brown liquid stool, hemoccult positive for blood, abdominal pain, elevated pulse, reduced BP, Hgb 10 g/dl, Hct 31%, and weight decreased 1.5 kg (3.3 lb) in 1 day. Following interventions, Mrs. Suleri was reassessed. She states her pain is currently 2/10. Her fatigue and poor food and fluid intake are unchanged. Her RBC, Hct, and Hgb were reassessed, and slight improvement was noted. Mrs. Suleri verbalized her understanding of the need to increase her fluid and food intake.

Consider how a complete and accurate assessment of Mrs. Suleri led to a plan of care that addresses her multiple problems. Although she is still bleeding, assessment is an important function that leads directly to improved patient care and outcomes in the end. Reassessment of interventions and physical status is paramount to high-quality practice.

> The nurse has performed the interventions as ordered by the healthcare provider. Select the assessment findings that indicate improvement in the patient's condition.

- ☐ Pain 2/10
- ☐ Hgb and Hct increased
- ☐ Continued poor food and fluid intake
- ☐ Fatigue level unchanged
- ☐ Verbalized her understanding of the treatment plan

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

- **Learning Objectives:** These objectives present the most important goals for learning by the time of completing the chapter.
- **Clinical Significance:** This feature highlights content critically related to a point of application. It appears wherever applicable in the chapter.

### CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Untreated or undertreated acute pain may lead to chronic pain syndromes, such as complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), which are difficult to treat (D'Arcy & Kiley, 2020). Inform patients that reporting pain and accepting pain interventions are beneficial because healing will be quicker in the long run.

- **Safety Alert:** This recurring feature presents important areas of concern or results that require immediate intervention or adjustments. It appears wherever a safety issue needs to be brought to the reader's attention.

### SAFETY ALERT

The nurse may call a rapid response team if they have an intuitive sense that something is going wrong with the patient or if the patient displays the following:

- An acute change in mental status
- Stridor
- Respirations less than 10 or greater than 32 breaths/min
- Increased effort to breathe
- Oxygen saturation less than 92%
- Pulse less than 55 or greater than 120 beats/min
- Systolic BP less than 90 or greater than 170 mm Hg
- Temperature less than 35°C (95°F) or greater than 39.5°C (103.1°F)
- New onset of chest pain
- Agitation or restlessness

- **Key Points:** Key points are summarized at the end of the chapter to reinforce the most important information.
- **Review Questions:** Each chapter ends with 10 questions that review content from throughout the chapter.
- **Tables of Abnormal Findings:** Although photographs or tables of normal findings may be integrated into the chapter in the appropriate location, comparative depictions of abnormal findings are generally found in tables of abnormal findings at the ends of the chapters.
- **Unfolding Patient Stories:** Written by the National League for Nursing, these cases are an engaging way to begin meaningful conversations in the classroom. These vignettes, which appear at the end of the last chapter of Units 1 through 4, feature patients from Wolters Kluwer's vSim for Nursing | Health Assessment (codeveloped by Laerdal Medical) and DocuCare products; however, each Unfolding Patient Story in the book stands alone, not requiring purchase of these products. For your convenience, a list of these case studies, along with their location in the book, appears in the "Case Studies in This Book" section later in this front matter.

## UNFOLDING PATIENT STORIES FOR UNIT 3

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Kim Johnson • Part 1



Kim Johnson is a 26-year-old police officer with paraplegia from a thoracic spinal cord injury at level 8 caused by a gunshot wound. She has started on bowel and bladder management programs. Describe the nursing assessment of the genital and rectal areas.

While assessing these areas, what potential complications should the nurse consider that are associated with intermittent urinary catheterization, rectal suppositories and digital stimulation, and incontinence? (Kim Johnson's story continues at the end of Unit 4.)

Care for Kim and other patients in a realistic virtual environment: **vSim for Nursing** (<http://thepoint.lww.com/vSimHealthAssessment>). Practice documenting these patients' care in DocuCare ([thepoint.lww.com/DocuCareEHR](http://thepoint.lww.com/DocuCareEHR)).

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Marvin Hayes • Part 2



Recall from Unit 1 Marvin Hayes, who underwent a laparoscopic abdominoperineal resection to remove a tumor in the lower rectum. A permanent sigmoid colostomy and closure of the rectum were performed. What nursing assessments are done to

evaluate the status of the rectal-perineal incision? What measures can the nurse take to reduce embarrassment or anxiety and to optimize comfort when assessing the rectal-perineal area?

Care for Marvin and other patients in a realistic virtual environment: **vSim for Nursing** (<http://thepoint.lww.com/vSimHealthAssessment>). Practice documenting these patients' care in DocuCare ([thepoint.lww.com/DocuCareEHR](http://thepoint.lww.com/DocuCareEHR)).

- **Concept Mastery Alert:** This feature clarifies fundamental nursing concepts to improve the reader's understanding of potentially confusing topics, as identified by Misconception Alerts in Lippincott's Adaptive Learning Powered by prepU.



#### Concept Mastery Alert

The most common sign of thyroid storm is tachycardia, but other possibilities include tachypnea, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, anxiety, hyperkinesia, fever, and weakness.

## A COMPREHENSIVE PACKAGE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

To further facilitate teaching and learning, a carefully designed ancillary package has been developed to assist faculty and students.

### INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

Tools to assist you with teaching your course are available upon adoption of this text on thePoint® at <http://thepoint.lww.com/Jensen4e>.

- A thoroughly revised **Test Generator** features NCLEX style questions mapped to chapter learning objectives.

- An extensive collection of materials is provided for each book chapter:
  - **Guided Lecture Notes** are organized by learning objectives and provide corresponding PowerPoint slide numbers to simplify preparation for lecture.
  - **PowerPoint Presentations** provide an easy way to integrate the textbook with your students' classroom experience; multiple-choice and true/false questions are included to promote class participation.
  - **Discussion Topics** (and suggested answers) can be used in the classroom or in online discussion boards to facilitate interaction with your students.
  - **Assignments** (and suggested answers) include group, written, clinical, and Web assignments to engage students in varied activities and assess their learning.
  - **Case Studies** with related questions (and suggested answers) give students an opportunity to apply their knowledge to a patient case similar to one they might encounter in practice.
  - **Answers to the Critical Thinking Challenges in the Book** include information to facilitate discussion of the case study questions woven throughout each chapter.
  - **Learning Objectives** from the book identify what you will be able to do after completing the material.
- A **QSEN Competency Map** identifies content and special features in the book related to competencies identified by the QSEN Institute.
- An **AACN Essentials Competency Map** identifies book content related to the AACN Essentials.
- An **Image Bank** enables you to use the photographs and illustrations from this textbook in your course materials.
- An **ebook** serves as a handy resource.
- A sample **Syllabus** is available.
- Access to all **Student Resources** is provided so that you can understand the student experience and use these resources in your course as well.

## STUDENT RESOURCES

An exciting set of free learning resources is available on **thePoint**® to help students review and apply vital concepts in health assessment nursing. Multimedia engines have been optimized so that students can access many of these resources on mobile devices. Students can access all these resources at <http://thepoint.lww.com/Jensen4e> using the codes printed in the front of their textbooks.

- **Journal Articles** offer access to current articles relevant to each chapter and available in Wolters Kluwer journals to familiarize students with nursing literature.
- **Interactive learning resources** appeal to a variety of learning styles:
  - **Watch and Learn Videos** reinforce skills from the textbook and appeal to visual and auditory learners.
  - **Concept in Action Animations** bring physiologic and pathophysiologic processes to life.
- Sample **Heart and Breath Sounds** provide listeners with examples of normal and abnormal lung sounds, as well as normal and abnormal heart sounds (including normal variations, extra heart sounds, and murmurs).

## vSIM FOR NURSING

vSim for Nursing, jointly developed by Laerdal Medical and Wolters Kluwer, offers innovative scenario-based learning modules consisting of Web-based virtual simulations, course learning materials, and curriculum tools designed to develop critical thinking skills and promote clinical confidence and competence. vSim for Nursing | Health Assessment includes 10 cases, authored by the National League for Nursing. Students can progress through suggested readings, pre- and postsimulation assessments, documentation assignments, and guided reflection questions and will receive an individualized feedback log immediately on completion of the simulation. Throughout the student learning experience,



the product offers remediation back to trusted Lippincott resources, including Lippincott Nursing Advisor and Lippincott Nursing Procedures—two online, evidence-based, clinical information solutions used in healthcare facilities throughout the United States. This innovative product provides a comprehensive patient-focused solution for learning and integrating simulation into the classroom.

Contact your Wolters Kluwer sales representative or visit <http://thepoint.lww.com/vsim> for options to enhance your health assessment nursing course with vSim for Nursing.

### LIPPINCOTT DOCUCARE

Lippincott DocuCare combines Web-based academic electronic health record (EHR) simulation software with clinical case scenarios, allowing students to learn how to use an EHR in a safe, true-to-life setting, while enabling instructors to measure their progress. Lippincott DocuCare's nonlinear solution works well in the classroom, simulation lab, and clinical practice.

Contact your Wolters Kluwer sales representative or visit <http://thepoint.lww.com/docuare> for options to enhance your health assessment nursing course with DocuCare.

## A COMPREHENSIVE, DIGITAL, INTEGRATED COURSE SOLUTION

*Lippincott CoursePoint+* is an integrated digital learning solution designed for the way students learn. It is the only nursing education solution that integrates:

- **Leading content in context:** Content provided in the context of the student learning path engages students and encourages interaction and learning on a deeper level.
- **Powerful tools to maximize class performance:** Course-specific tools, such as adaptive learning powered by prepU, provide a personalized learning experience for every student.
- **Real-time data to measure students' progress:** Student performance data provided in an intuitive display let you quickly spot which students are having difficulty or which concepts the class as a whole is struggling to grasp.
- **Preparation for practice:** Integrated virtual simulation and evidence-based resources improve student competence, confidence, and success in transitioning to practice.
  - **vSim for Nursing:** Codeveloped by Laerdal Medical and Wolters Kluwer, vSim for Nursing simulates real nursing scenarios and allows students to interact with virtual patients in a safe, online environment.
  - **Lippincott Advisor for Education:** With over 8,500 entries covering the latest evidence-based content and drug information, Lippincott Advisor for Education provides students with the most up-to-date information possible, while giving them valuable experience with the same point-of-care content they will encounter in practice.
- **Training services and personalized support:** To ensure your success, our dedicated educational consultants and training coaches will provide expert guidance every step of the way.

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# CONTENTS

Contributors	vi
Reviewers	viii
Preface	ix

## UNIT 1

### Foundations of Nursing Health Assessment

#### 1 The Nurse's Role in Health Assessment 3

##### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 4

###### Roles of the Professional Nurse 4

- Provider of Care 4
- Manager of Care 4
- Member of a Profession 5
  - THE REGISTERED NURSE 5
  - THE ADVANCED PRACTICE REGISTERED NURSE 5
- Registered Nurse Versus Specialty or Advanced Practice Assessments 6
- Teaching and Health Promotion 6

###### Wellness and Illness 6

###### Social Determinants of Health: *Healthy People 2030* 6

###### What Is Health Assessment? 6

- Nursing Process 7
  - ASSESS 7
  - DIAGNOSE 7
  - IDENTIFY OUTCOMES 7
  - PLAN CARE 8
  - IMPLEMENT 8
  - EVALUATE OUTCOMES 8

- Critical Thinking 8
- Diagnostic Reasoning 9
- Clinical Judgment 9

###### Types of Nursing Assessments 9

- Emergency and Urgent Assessment 9
- Comprehensive Assessment 10
- Focused Assessment 10

###### Priority Setting 11

###### Frequency of Assessment 11

###### Lifespan Issues 11

###### Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 11

###### Components of the Health Assessment 12

##### SUBJECTIVE CUES 12

##### OBJECTIVE CUES 13

###### Documentation and Communication:

- Progress Note and SBAR 13

###### Frameworks for Health Assessment 13

- Functional Assessment 13

- Head-to-Toe Assessment 14
- Body Systems Approach 15

##### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 15

###### Deciding What to Do First 15

###### Priority Setting 15

###### Priority Setting Frameworks 15

- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 15
- Urgent and Acute Versus Chronic 16
- Airway, Breathing, Circulation, Disability Framework 16
- Safety/Risk Reduction 16
- Nursing Process 16
- Survival Potential 16
- Least Restrictive Interventions 16

###### Using Evidence-Based Practice 16

- Generate Solutions 18

###### Review Questions 20

#### 2 The Health History and Interview 22

##### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 23

###### The Communication Process 23

- Therapeutic Communication 24
  - NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS 24
  - VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS 25

##### SUBJECTIVE CUES 26

###### Nontherapeutic Responses 26

- False Reassurance 26
- Sympathy 26
- Unwanted Advice 26
  - BIASED QUESTIONS 27
  - CHANGING THE SUBJECT 28
  - DISTRACTIONS 28
  - TECHNICAL OR OVERWHELMING LANGUAGE 28
  - INTERRUPTING 28
- Professional Expectations and Boundaries 28
- Culturally Competent Communication 29
  - PATIENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH SKILLS 29
  - WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER 29
  - GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION BIAS 31

##### OBJECTIVE CUES 31

###### Phases of the Interview Process 31

- Preinteraction Phase 31
- Beginning Phase 31
- Working Phase 32
- Closing Phase 32

###### Health History Sources 32

- Primary and Secondary Data Sources 32
- Reliability of the Source 32

**Components of the Health History 32**

- Demographic Data 33
- Reason for Seeking Care 33
- History of Present Illness 33
  - LOCATION 33
  - ONSET/DURATION/TIMING 33
  - INTENSITY 34
  - QUALITY/DESCRIPTION 34
  - AGGRAVATING/ASSOCIATED/ALLEVIATING FACTORS 34
  - PAIN GOAL 34
  - FUNCTIONAL GOAL 34
- Past Health History 34
  - CHILDHOOD ILLNESSES 34
  - PAST ILLNESSES 34
  - SURGERIES 34
  - INJURIES AND TRAUMA 34
  - OBSTETRIC HISTORY 34
  - HEALTH SCREENING 34
  - GENETICS 35
- Current Medications 35
- Allergies 35
- Family History 35
- Functional Health Assessment 35
- Growth and Development 37
- Review of Systems 38

**Psychosocial and Lifestyle Factors 41**

- Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Assessment 41
- Mental Health Assessment 41
- Neglect, Abuse, and Violence Assessment 41
- Sexual History 42
- Life Span Considerations 42
- Challenging Situations 43
  - HEARING IMPAIRMENT 43
  - LOW LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS 43
  - COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT 43
  - MENTAL ILLNESS 43
  - ANXIETY 43
  - CRYING 44
  - ANGER 44
  - USE OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS, OR MIND-ALTERING SUBSTANCES 44
  - PERSONAL QUESTIONS AND BOUNDARIES 44
  - SEXUAL AGGRESSION 44

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 45****REVIEW QUESTIONS 49****3 Techniques, Safety, and Infection Control 51****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 52****Safety Precautions to Prevent Infection 52**

- Standard Precautions and Transmission-Based Precautions 52
- HAND HYGIENE 53
- PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT 53

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 56****OBJECTIVE CUES 57****Basic and Advanced Techniques 57**

- Inspection 58
- Palpation 58

- LIGHT PALPATION 59
- MODERATE PALPATION 59
- BIMANUAL DEEP PALPATION 59

**Percussion 59**

- DIRECT PERCUSSION 59
- INDIRECT PERCUSSION 59
- PERCUSSION SOUNDS 60

**Auscultation 61**

- THE STETHOSCOPE 61

**Advanced Techniques and Special Equipment 62**

- OPHTHALMOSCOPE 62
- OTOSCOPE 63
- TUNING FORK 63
- REFLEX HAMMER 64

**Equipment for a Complete Physical Assessment 64****Older Adults 65****Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 65****CLINICAL JUDGMENT 66****Make Clinical Decisions 66****Review Questions 70****4 Documentation and Interprofessional Communication 71****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 72****Patient Medical Record 72****Purposes of the Medical Record 72**

- LEGAL DOCUMENT 72
- COMMUNICATION AND CARE PLANNING 72
- QUALITY ASSURANCE 72
- FINANCIAL REIMBURSEMENT 72
- EDUCATION 73
- RESEARCH 73

**Components of the Medical Record 73****Electronic Medical Record 73****SUBJECTIVE CUES 74****Priority Urgent Assessment 74****OBJECTIVE CUES 75****Principles Governing Documentation 75**

- Confidentiality 75
- Accuracy and Completeness 76
- Logical Organization 77
- Timeliness 77
- Conciseness 77

**Documentation 77**

- Nursing Admission Assessment 78
- Flow Sheets 79
- Plan of Care and Clinical Pathway 79
- Progress or Case Note 79
  - NARRATIVE NOTES 80
  - SOAP NOTES 80
  - PIE NOTES 80
  - DAR NOTE 80

**Charting by Exception 81****Discharge Note 81****Home Care Documentation 81****Long-Term Care Documentation 81****Written Handoff Summary 82**



Verbal Communication	82
Verbal Handoff Summary	82
Reporting	82
QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE REPORTING	83
<b>CLINICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>84</b>
SBAR Model	84
Reporting to the Primary Healthcare Provider	85
PHONE AND URGENT COMMUNICATION	85
Review Questions	88

## UNIT 2

### General Examinations

#### 5 Vital Signs and General Survey 93

##### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 94

##### SUBJECTIVE CUES 94

Priority Urgent Assessment 94

Subjective Data Collection 94

    Assessment of Risk Factors 94

    Teaching and Health Promotion 94

    Common Symptoms 95

##### OBJECTIVE CUES 97

Equipment 97

Preparation 97

General Survey 97

Anthropometric Measurements 99

Vital Signs 102

    Temperature 102

        DETERMINE WHICH ROUTE TO USE 103

        ORAL ROUTE 103

        AXILLARY ROUTE 103

        TYMPANIC MEMBRANE 103

        TEMPORAL ARTERY 104

        RECTAL ROUTE 104

    Pulse 106

    Respirations 109

    Oxygen Saturation 111

    Blood Pressure 112

    Vital Signs Monitor 118

    Doppler Technique 118

Older Adults 119

    General Survey 119

    Height and Weight 119

    Temperature 119

    Pulse 119

    Respirations 119

    Pulse Oximetry 119

    Blood Pressure 119

Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 120

##### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 120

Make Clinical Decisions 120

    Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 120

    Generate Solutions 123

Review Questions 126

Tables of Abnormal Findings 127

#### 6 Pain Assessment 129

##### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 130

Neuroanatomy of Pain 130

    Peripheral Nervous System 130

    Central Nervous System 130

    Gate Control Theory 131

    Nociception 131

Types of Pain 132

    Acute Pain 132

    Chronic Pain 133

    Neuropathic Pain 133

    Nociplastic Pain 133

Older Adults 134

    Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 134

##### SUBJECTIVE CUES 135

Priority Urgent Assessment 135

Subjective Data Collection 135

    Assessment of Risk Factors 135

    Teaching and Health Promotion 135

    Common Symptoms 135

##### OBJECTIVE CUES 137

Pain Assessment Tools 138

    One-Dimensional Pain Scales 138

        NUMERIC PAIN INTENSITY SCALE 138

        VISUAL ANALOGUE SCALE (VAS) 139

    Multidimensional Pain Scales 139

        BRIEF PAIN INVENTORY 139

        MCGILL PAIN QUESTIONNAIRE 139

        THE PAIN, ENJOYMENT AND GENERAL ACTIVITY (PEG) TOOL 140

        CLINICALLY ALIGNED PAIN ASSESSMENT (CAPA) TOOL 140

Lifespan Considerations 141

    Newborns, Infants, and Children 141

    Older Adults 142

Special Considerations 143

    Patients Unable to Report Pain 143

    The Opioid Crisis 143

    Patients With Opioid Tolerance 143

    Reassessing and Documenting Pain 144

    Barriers to Pain Assessment 144

##### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 145

Make Clinical Decisions 145

    Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 145

    Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 145

    Generate Solutions 147

Review Questions 149

#### 7 Nutritional Assessment 152

##### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 153

Nutritional Concepts 153

    Primary Nutrients 153

        CARBOHYDRATES 153

        PROTEINS AND AMINO ACIDS 153

        LIPIDS AND FATTY ACIDS 153

        VITAMINS AND MINERALS 154

        SUPPLEMENTS 154

        FLUID AND ELECTROLYTES 155

Food Safety and Food Security 156

FOOD-BORNE PATHOGENS 156

ORGANIC FOOD 156

FOOD SECURITY 156

Nutritional Guidelines 156

**Lifespan Considerations 156**

People Who Are Pregnant 156

Infants, Children, and Adolescents 157

Older Adults 157

**Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 158****SUBJECTIVE CUES 159**

Priority Urgent Assessment 159

Subjective Data Collection 159

Assessment of Risk Factors 160

Teaching and Health Promotion 162

Common Symptoms 162

Comprehensive Nutritional History 164

FOOD RECORDS 164

DIRECT OBSERVATION 164

**OBJECTIVE CUES 166**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 166

Equipment 166

Preparation 166

Comprehensive Physical Assessment 166

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 171**

Make Clinical Decisions 171

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 171

SERUM PROTEINS 171

HEMOGLOBIN AND HEMATOCRIT 171

LYMPHOCYTE COUNT 171

CREATININE EXCRETION 172

NITROGEN BALANCE 172

SKIN TESTING 172

LIPID MEASUREMENTS 172

OTHER LABORATORY TESTS 172

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 172

Review Questions 176

Tables of Abnormal Findings 177

## 8 Assessment of Developmental Stages 180

**STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 181****Psychosocial Development 181**

Infant: Trust Versus Mistrust: Stage I 181

Toddler: Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt: Stage II 181

Preschooler: Initiative Versus Guilt: Stage III 181

School-Age Child: Industry Versus Inferiority: Stage IV 182

Adolescent: Identity Versus Role Confusion: Stage V 182

Early Adult: Intimacy Versus Isolation: Stage VI 182

Middle Adult: Generativity Versus Stagnation: Stage VII 182

Late Adult: Ego Integrity Versus Despair: Stage VIII 182

**Cognitive Development 183**

Infant: Sensorimotor Stage I 183

Toddler and Preschooler: Preoperational Stage II 184

School-Age Child: Concrete Operations III 184

Adolescent: Formal Operations IV 185

Young Adult: Formal Operations 185

**Development of Wisdom and Values in Adults 185**

Middle Adult: Cognitive Expertise 185

Older Adult: Wisdom 186

**Physical Development 186**

Newborn and Infant 186

Child and Adolescent 187

Adults and Older Adults 188

**Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 188****SUBJECTIVE CUES 189**

Priority Urgent Assessment 189

Subjective Data Collection 189

Assessment of Risk Factors 190

Teaching and Health Promotion 191

INFANTS, CHILDREN, AND ADOLESCENTS 191

ADOLESCENTS 193

OLDER ADULTS 193

**OBJECTIVE CUES 194**

Comprehensive Physical Assessment 194

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 199**

Make Clinical Decisions 199

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 199

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 199

Generate Solutions 201

Review Questions 203

## 9 Mental Health, Violence, and Substance Use Disorder 205

**STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 206**

Role of the Nurse in Mental Health 206

Violence 206

Substance Use Disorder and Addiction 207

Definitions 207

Statistics 208

Alcohol Use Disorder 208

Opioid Crisis 210

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 210**

Priority Urgent Assessment 210

Subjective Data Collection 210

Interviewing Patients About Violence 211

DOCUMENTATION AND LEGAL ISSUES RELATED TO  
VIOLENCE 211

Alcohol and Drug Use Disorder Interview 212

Risk Factors for Mental Health Conditions 212

Dementia, Delirium, and Depression Assessment 216

Teaching and Health Promotion 217

Common Symptoms 217

**OBJECTIVE CUES 221**

Comprehensive Mental Health Assessment 221

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 229**

Make Clinical Decisions 229

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 229

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 230

Generate Solutions 231

Review Questions 234

**10 Cultural Assessment 236****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 237**

- Cultural Assessment and Cultural Competency 237
  - Characteristics of Culture 238
  - Nursing Models for Cultural Assessment and Care 238

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 238**

- Subjective Data Collection 238
  - Implementing the Cultural Assessment: Practical Aspects 242
  - CULTURAL HEALTH BELIEFS AND PRACTICES 243

**OBJECTIVE CUES 248**

- Social Assessment 248
  - Social Determinants of Health 248
  - Social Assessment of the Individual 248
  - Social Assessment of the Community 249

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 252**

- Making Clinical Decisions 252
  - Prioritize Hypothesis and Take Action 252
- Review Questions 257

**UNIT 3****Regional Examinations****11 Skin, Hair, and Nails Assessment 261****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 262**

- SKIN 262
  - Epidermis 262
  - Dermis 262
  - Subcutaneous Layer 262
- Hair 263
- Nails 263
- Glands 264
- Older Adults 264
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 265

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 267**

- Priority Urgent Assessment 267
- Subjective Data Collection 267
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 267
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 270
  - COMMON INTEGUMENTARY SYMPTOMS 271

**OBJECTIVE CUES 274**

- Basic and Advanced Techniques 274
- Equipment 274
- Preparation 274
- Comprehensive Skin Assessment 274

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 281**

- Make Clinical Decisions 281
  - Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 281
  - Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 281
  - Generate Solutions 283
- Review Questions 285
- Tables of Abnormal Findings 286

**12 Head and Neck Assessment, With Vision and Hearing Basics 312****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 313**

- The Head 313
  - Skeletal Structure 313
  - Muscles 313
  - Blood Supply 313
  - Nerve Supply 313
  - Salivary Glands 314
- Vision 314
- Hearing 314
- The Neck 314
  - Trachea 314
  - Thyroid and Parathyroid Glands 315
- Lymphatics 315
- Older Adults 315
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 316

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 316**

- Priority Urgent Assessment 316
- Subjective Data Collection 317
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 317
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 318
  - Common Symptoms 318

**OBJECTIVE CUES 321**

- Basic and Advanced Techniques 321
- Equipment 322
- Preparation 322
- Comprehensive Physical Assessment 322

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 328**

- Make Clinical Decisions 328
  - Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 328
  - Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 328
  - Generate Solutions 330
- Review Questions 332
- Tables of Abnormal Findings 334

**13 Eye Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice 338****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 339**

- The Eye 339
  - Extraocular Structures 339
  - Extraocular Muscle Function 339
  - Intraocular Structures 340
  - Vision 340
- Older Adults 340
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 342

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 342**

- Priority Urgent Assessment 342
- Subjective Data Collection 343
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 343
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 344
  - Common Symptoms 344

**OBJECTIVE CUES 346**

- Basic and Advanced Techniques 346

Equipment (For Advanced Practice Assessment)	347
Preparation	347
Comprehensive Physical Assessment	347
Visual Acuity	347
Visual Fields	348
Extraocular Muscle Movements	348
Internal Ocular Structures	356

#### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 359

Make Clinical Decisions	359
Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	359
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Actions	359
Generate Solutions	361

#### Review Questions 364

#### Tables of Abnormal Findings 365

## 14 Ear Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice 374

### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 375

#### Ear 375

External Ear	375
Middle Ear	376
Inner Ear	376

#### Hearing 376

Air and Bone Conduction	377
Hearing Difficulties	377

#### Vestibular Function 378

#### Older Adults 378

#### Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 378

#### SUBJECTIVE CUES 378

##### Priority Urgent Assessment 378

##### Subjective Data Collection 379

Assessment of Risk Factors	379
Teaching and Health Promotion	381
Common Symptoms	381

#### OBJECTIVE CUES 384

##### Basic and Advanced Techniques 384

##### Equipment (For Advanced Practice Assessment) 384

##### Preparation 384

##### Comprehensive Physical Assessment 385

#### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 391

##### Make Clinical Decisions 391

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	391
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action	391

##### Review Questions 397

##### Tables of Abnormal Findings 398

## 15 Nose, Sinuses, Mouth, and Throat Assessment 402

### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 403

#### Nose 403

Nerve and Blood Supply	404
Lymph Drainage	404

#### Sinuses 404

#### Mouth 405

Tongue	406
Salivary Glands	406
Teeth and Gums	407

#### Throat, Tonsils, and Adenoids 408

#### Older Adults 408

#### Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 408

Oral Health in Vulnerable Populations	409
Congenital Defects in Children	409
Cancer	409
Sleep-Disordered Breathing	410

#### SUBJECTIVE CUES 410

##### Priority Urgent Assessment 410

##### Subjective Data Collection 410

Assessment of Risk Factors	410
Teaching and Health Promotion	414
TOBACCO USE	414
SLEEP DISORDERS	414
CANCER	414
ORAL HEALTH	414
HEREDITARY HEMORRHAGIC TELANGIECTASIA	414
Common Nose, Sinus, and Mouth Symptoms	414

#### OBJECTIVE CUES 418

##### Basic and Advanced Techniques 418

##### Equipment 418

##### Preparation 418

##### Comprehensive Physical Assessment 419

#### CLINICAL JUDGMENT 425

##### Make Clinical Decisions 425

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	425
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action	426
Generate Solutions	428

##### Review Questions 431

##### Tables of Abnormal Findings 432

## 16 Thorax and Lung Assessment 445

### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 446

#### The Thorax 446

Anterior Thoracic Landmarks	446
Posterior Thoracic Landmarks	448
Reference Lines	448

#### Lobes of the Lungs 449

#### The Respiratory Tract 450

Lower Respiratory Tract	450
Upper Respiratory Tract	451
Mechanics of Respiration	451

#### Older Adults 451

#### Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 452

#### SUBJECTIVE CUES 452

##### Priority Urgent Assessment 452

##### Subjective Data Collection 453

Assessment of Risk Factors	453
Teaching and Health Promotion	455
SMOKING CESSATION	455
PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE	455
PREVENTION OF ASTHMA	455
IMMUNIZATIONS	455
Common Symptoms	456

#### OBJECTIVE CUES 460

##### Basic and Advanced Techniques 460



Equipment	460
Preparation	460
Comprehensive Physical Assessment	460
<b>CLINICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>473</b>
Make Clinical Decisions	473
Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	473
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action	473
Review Questions	478
Tables of Abnormal Findings	479

## 17 Heart and Neck Vessels Assessment 483

<b>STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION</b>	<b>484</b>
Anatomy	484
Neck Vessels	485
Heart Chambers	485
Valves	485
Heart Wall	486
Coronary Arteries and Veins	486
Conduction System	487
Physiology	487
Pulmonary and Systemic Circulation	487
Cardiac Cycle	488
SYSTOLE	488
DIASTOLE	488
RELATION TO HEART SOUNDS (S1 AND S2)	488
CARDIAC OUTPUT	488
CONTROL OF HEART RATE	489
RELATION TO ELECTROCARDIOGRAM	489
HEART RHYTHM	489
Jugular Pulsations	490
Older Adults	490
Cultural Variations and Health Disparities	491
<b>SUBJECTIVE CUES</b>	<b>491</b>
Priority Urgent Assessment	491
Subjective Data Collection	492
Assessment of Risk Factors	492
Teaching and Health Promotion	493
SMOKING CESSATION	494
CONTROL OF BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL LEVEL	494
Common Symptoms	494
<b>OBJECTIVE CUES</b>	<b>498</b>
Basic and Advanced Techniques	498
Equipment	499
Preparation	499
Comprehensive Physical Assessment	500
Auscultation	503
EXTRA HEART SOUNDS	504
MURMURS	504
VARIATIONS IN HEART SOUNDS	508
<b>CLINICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>509</b>
Make Clinical Decisions	509
Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	509
LIPID PROFILE	509
CARDIAC ENZYMES AND PROTEINS	509
ELECTROCARDIOGRAM	509
CHEST X-RAY	509
ECHOCARDIOGRAM	509

HEMODYNAMIC MONITORING	509
STRESS TEST	509
CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION AND CORONARY ANGIOGRAPHY	509
CARDIAC ELECTROPHYSIOLOGY	509
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action	510
Review Questions	514
Tables of Abnormal Findings	515

## 18 Peripheral Vascular and Lymphatic Assessment 523

<b>STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION</b>	<b>524</b>
Arterial System	524
Venous System	524
Capillaries	526
Lymphatic System	526
Older Adults	527
Cultural Variations and Health Disparities	528
<b>SUBJECTIVE CUES</b>	<b>529</b>
Priority Urgent Assessment	529
Subjective Data Collection	529
Assessment of Risk Factors	529
Teaching and Health Promotion	531
PATIENTS WITH PERIPHERAL ARTERIAL DISEASE	531
PATIENTS WITH VENOUS DISEASE	532
PATIENTS WITH LYMPHATIC DISORDERS	532
Common Symptoms	532
<b>OBJECTIVE CUES</b>	<b>535</b>
Basic and Advanced Techniques	535
Equipment	536
Preparation	536
Comprehensive Physical Assessment	536
<b>CLINICAL JUDGMENT</b>	<b>544</b>
Make Clinical Decisions	544
Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing	544
Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action	545
Review Questions	549
Tables of Abnormal Findings	550

## 19 Breast and Axillae Assessment 556

<b>STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION</b>	<b>557</b>
Landmarks	557
Breast Structures	557
Axillae and Lymph Nodes	558
Lifespan Considerations	558
Pregnancy	558
Newborns and Infants	559
Children and Adolescents	559
Older Adults	560
Breasts in Males Assigned at Birth	560
Cultural Variations and Health Disparities	560
<b>SUBJECTIVE CUES</b>	<b>562</b>
Priority Urgent Assessment	562
Subjective Data Collection	562
Assessment of Risk Factors	562
Teaching and Health Promotion	564
Teaching the Self-breast Examination	564
Common Symptoms	564

**OBJECTIVE CUES 567**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 567  
 Equipment 568  
 Preparation 568  
 Comprehensive Physical Assessment 568

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 575**

Make Clinical Decisions 575  
 Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 575  
 Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 576  
 Generate Solutions 578

Review Questions 581

Tables of Abnormal Findings 582

**20 Abdominal Assessment 585****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 586**

Anatomical Landmarks 586  
 Reference Lines 588  
 Abdominal Organs 588  
 Gastrointestinal Organs 588  
 Genitourinary Organs 588  
 Blood Vessels, Peritoneum, and Muscles 588  
 Ingestion and Digestion 589  
 Absorption of Nutrients 589  
 Elimination 589  
 Older Adults 589  
 Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 590

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 590**

Priority Urgent Assessment 590  
 Subjective Data Collection 590  
 Assessment of Risk Factors 590  
 Teaching and Health Promotion 593  
 COLORECTAL CANCER 593  
 FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES 594  
 HEPATITIS 594  
 Common Symptoms 594

**OBJECTIVE CUES 599**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 599  
 Equipment 600  
 Preparation 600  
 Comprehensive Physical Assessment 600

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 612**

Make Clinical Decisions 612  
 Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 612  
 ESOPHAGOGASTRODUODENOSCOPY 612  
 BARIUM ENEMA 612  
 COLONOSCOPY 612  
 ENDOSCOPIC RETROGRADE CHOLANGIOPANCREATOGRAPHY 612  
 COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHY SCAN 612  
 MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING 612  
 Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 612  
 Generate Solutions 614

Review Questions 617

Tables of Abnormal Findings 618

**21 Musculoskeletal Assessment 624****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 625**

Bones 625  
 Muscles 625  
 Joints 625  
 Temporomandibular Joint 626  
 Shoulder 626  
 Elbow 627  
 Wrist and Hand 628  
 Hip 628  
 Knee 628  
 Ankle and Foot 629  
 Spine 629  
 Older Adults 629  
 Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 630

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 630**

Priority Urgent Assessment 630  
 Subjective Data Collection 631  
 Assessment of Risk Factors 631  
 Teaching and Health Promotion 633  
 BONE DENSITY 633  
 SCOLIOSIS SCREENING 633  
 Common Musculoskeletal Symptoms 633

**OBJECTIVE CUES 637**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 637  
 Equipment 637  
 Preparation 637  
 Initial Survey 638  
 Comprehensive Physical Assessment 641  
 Risk for Falling 657

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 659**

Make Clinical Decisions 659  
 Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 659  
 Prioritize Hypothesis and Take Action 659  
 Generate Solutions 661  
 Review Questions 664  
 Tables of Abnormal Findings 665

**22 Neurological and Mental Status Assessment 673****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 674**

Central Nervous System 674  
 Brain 674  
 CEREBRUM 674  
 BRAINSTEM 676  
 CEREBELLUM 677  
 Protective Structures of the Central Nervous System 677  
 Spinal Cord 678  
 Peripheral Nervous System 679  
 Cranial Nerves 679  
 Spinal Nerves 679  
 Autonomic Nervous System 680  
 Reflexes 680  
 Older Adults 681  
 Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 681

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 682**

Priority Urgent Assessment 682

Subjective Data Collection 683

Assessment of Risk Factors 683

Teaching and Health Promotion 685

STROKE PREVENTION 685

INJURY PREVENTION 685

CHRONIC NEUROLOGICAL CONDITIONS 685

Common Symptoms 685

**OBJECTIVE CUES 689**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 689

Equipment 689

Preparation 689

Comprehensive Physical Assessment 690

Neurological Assessment in Selected Situations 704

Screening Examination of a Healthy Patient 704

Serial Neurological Assessment and Documentation 704

Assessment of Meningeal Signs 705

Assessing the Unconscious Patient 705

Brain Herniation Syndromes 706

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 707**

Make Clinical Decisions 707

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 707

ANATOMICAL IMAGING 707

ELECTRICAL CONDUCTION TESTING 707

CEREBROSPINAL FLUID/SPINAL PROCEDURES 707

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 708

Generate Solutions 710

Review Questions 713

Tables of Abnormal Findings 714

**23 Male Genitalia and Rectal Assessment 722****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 723**

External Genitalia 723

Internal Genitalia 724

Testes 724

Ducts 725

Glands 725

Rectum and Anus 725

Rectum 725

Anal Canal and Anus 726

Life Span Considerations 726

Newborns and Infants 726

Children and Adolescents 726

Older Adults 726

Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 727

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 728**

Priority Urgent Assessment 728

Subjective Data Collection 729

Assessment of Risk Factors 729

Teaching and Health Promotion 732

HEALTH GOALS 732

TESTICULAR SELF-EXAMINATION 732

SCREENING FOR PROSTATE CANCER 733

Common Symptoms 733

**OBJECTIVE CUES 736**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 736

Equipment 736

Preparation 736

Comprehensive Physical Assessment 737

Additional Techniques 739

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 745**

Make Clinical Decisions 745

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic

Testing 745

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 745

Generate Solutions 747

Review Questions 750

Tables of Abnormal Findings 751

**24 Female Genitalia and Rectal Assessment 761****STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 762**

External Genitalia 762

Internal Genitalia 762

Vagina 762

Uterus 762

Cervix 763

Fallopian Tubes 763

Ovaries 763

Rectum, Anal Canal, and Anus 764

Rectum 764

Anal Canal and Anus 764

Hormone Regulation 764

Life Span Considerations 764

Pregnancy 764

Infants, Children, and Adolescents 765

Menopausal and Older Adults 767

Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 767

**SUBJECTIVE CUES 767**

Priority Urgent Assessment 767

Subjective Data Collection 768

Assessment of Risk Factors 769

Teaching and Health Promotion 773

Common Symptoms 774

LIFE SPAN CONSIDERATIONS 775

**OBJECTIVE CUES 778**

Basic and Advanced Techniques 778

Equipment 778

Preparation 778

Comprehensive Physical Assessment 780

**CLINICAL JUDGMENT 789**

Make Clinical Decisions 789

Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic

Testing 789

Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 790

Generate Solutions 791

Review Questions 793

Tables of Abnormal Findings 794

## UNIT 4

## Special Populations and Foci

## 25 Pregnancy 807

## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 808

- Preconception 808
- First Trimester (0 to 13 Weeks) 809
- Second Trimester (13 to 26 Weeks) 810
- Third Trimester (26 to 40 Weeks) 810
- Determining Weeks of Gestation 811
- Role of the Registered Nurse in the Outpatient Setting 811
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 812
  - Infant Health Disparities 812
  - Birthing Parent Health Disparities 812

## SUBJECTIVE CUES 813

- Priority Urgent Assessment 813
- Subjective Data Collection 814
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 814
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 817
  - Common Symptoms 818

## OBJECTIVE CUES 821

- Equipment 821
- Preparation 821
- Comprehensive Physical Assessment 822

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT 830

- Make Clinical Decisions 830
  - Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 830
  - Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 830
  - Generate Solutions 834
- Review Questions 837

## Tables of Abnormal Findings 838

## 26 Newborns and Infants 840

## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 841

- Physical Growth 841
- Motor Development 841
- Psychosocial and Cognitive Development 841
- Language Development 841
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 841

## SUBJECTIVE CUES 842

- Priority Urgent Assessment 842
- Subjective Data Collection 843
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 843
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 844
    - SAFE SLEEP HABITS 844
    - CHOKING 844
    - CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION TRAINING FOR CAREGIVERS 844
    - IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULES 845
    - CHILD SAFETY CAR SEAT 845
    - POISON CONTROL 845
    - BREAST/CHESTFEEDING 845
    - FORMULA FEEDING 846
    - TOOTH DECAY 846
- Common Symptoms 846

## OBJECTIVE CUES 848

- Equipment 848
- Preparation 848
- Comprehensive Physical Assessment 849

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT 865

- Make Clinical Decisions 865
  - Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 865
  - Prioritize Hypothesis and Take Action 865
  - Generate Solutions 867
- Review Questions 870
- Tables of Abnormal Findings 872

## 27 Children and Adolescents 878

## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 879

- Physical Growth 879
- Motor Development 879
- Language 879
- Psychosocial and Cognitive Development 880
- Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 880

## SUBJECTIVE CUES 880

- Priority Urgent Assessment 880
- Subjective Data Collection 881
  - Assessment of Risk Factors 881
  - Teaching and Health Promotion 885
    - IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULES 886
    - CAR SAFETY 886
    - AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF POISON CONTROL CENTERS 886
    - SAFETY AT HOME 886
    - FIRE SAFETY 887
    - WATER SAFETY 887
    - OUTDOOR SAFETY 887
    - PREVENTION OF SUBSTANCE AND ALCOHOL USE 887
    - NUTRITION AND PREVENTION OF OBESITY 887
    - PREVENTION OF DENTAL CARIES 887
    - MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES 887
    - PROMOTION OF CONTRACEPTION AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION PREVENTION 887
- Common Symptoms 888

## OBJECTIVE CUES 889

- Equipment 889
- Preparation 889
  - Developmental Screening 890
- Comprehensive Physical Assessment 891

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT 902

- Make Clinical Decisions 902
  - Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 902
  - Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 902
  - Generate Solutions 904
- Review Questions 906

## 28 Older Adults 909

## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 910

- Skin, Hair, and Nails 910
- Head and Neck 910
  - Eyes and Vision 910
  - Ears and Hearing 910
  - Nose, Sinuses, Mouth, and Throat 911



Thorax and Lungs 911  
 Heart and Neck Vessels 911  
 Peripheral Vascular System and Lymphatics 911  
 Breasts/Chest and Lymphatics 912  
 Abdomen, Metabolism, and Elimination 912  
 Musculoskeletal System 912  
 Neurological System 912  
 Genitourinary Systems 912  
 Endocrine System 912  
 Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 913

#### **SUBJECTIVE CUES 913**

Priority Urgent Assessment 913  
 Subjective Data Collection 913  
   Interviewing the Older Adult 913  
   Assessment of Risk Factors 915  
   Teaching and Health Promotion 918  
     OVERALL ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR HEALTH PROMOTION 919  
     NUTRITION 919  
     POLYPHARMACY AND MEDICATIONS 919  
     SAFETY 919  
   Common Symptoms 919

#### **OBJECTIVE CUES 922**

Equipment 922  
 Preparation 922  
 Comprehensive Physical Assessment 923

#### **CLINICAL JUDGMENT 929**

Make Clinical Decisions 929  
   Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 929  
   Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 929  
   Generate Solutions 931  
 Review Questions 933

## **UNIT 5**

### **Putting It All Together**

## **29 Assessment of the Hospitalized Adult 939**

#### **STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION 940**

Structure and Function: Foundation for Assessment 940  
 Types of Hospital Assessments 940  
 Assessment, Accountability, and Delegation 941  
 Patient Safety and Risk Reduction in the Hospital Setting 941  
   Safety Interventions for Hospitalized Patients 942  
 Older Adults 943  
 Cultural Variations and Health Disparities 943

#### **SUBJECTIVE CUES 944**

Urgent Assessment 944  
 Subjective Data Collection 945

#### **OBJECTIVE CUES 946**

Equipment 946  
 Preparation 946  
 Communicating the Assessment 946  
 Comprehensive Admitting Assessment 947  
 Shift and Focused Hospital Assessments 948  
   General Shift Assessment 948  
   Focused Shift Assessment 948  
 Specialized Assessments for the Hospitalized Patient 948

#### **CLINICAL JUDGMENT 951**

Make Clinical Decisions 951  
   Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 951  
   Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 951  
   Generate Solutions 953  
 Review Questions 956

## **30 Head-to-Toe Assessment of the Adult 959**

#### **SUBJECTIVE CUES 960**

Priority Urgent Assessment 960  
 Subjective Data Collection 960  
   Focused History 960  
   Past Medical History 961  
   Review of Systems 961  
   PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORY 962  
   FUNCTIONAL HEALTH STATUS 962  
   ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING 962  
   Teaching and Health Promotion 962  
   Common Symptoms 968

#### **OBJECTIVE CUES 969**

Equipment 969  
 Preparation 970  
 Comprehensive Physical Assessment 970

#### **CLINICAL JUDGMENT 981**

Make Clinical Decisions 981  
   Analyze Laboratory and Diagnostic Testing 981  
   Prioritize Hypotheses and Take Action 981  
 Review Questions 985

Appendix A: Answers to Review Questions 987

Appendix B: Answers to Next Generation NCLEX  
 Style Questions 1005

Illustration Credit List 1035

Index 1039

# CASE STUDIES IN THIS BOOK

## CASES THAT UNFOLD ACROSS UNITS

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Rashid Ahmed

Part 1: Unit 1 89

Part 2: Unit 2 258

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Marvin Hayes

Part 1: Unit 1 89

Part 2: Unit 3 804

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Edith Jacobson

Part 1: Unit 2 258

Part 2: Unit 4 935

### Unfolding Patient Stories: Kim Johnson

Part 1: Unit 3 804

Part 2: Unit 4 935

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASES THAT UNFOLD WITHIN CHAPTERS

### Chapter 1: The Nurse's Role in Health Assessment

Ms. Maria Ortiz, age 52, type 2 diabetes 3, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19

### Chapter 2: The Health History and Interview

Mr. Phil Rowan, age 36, HIV/AIDS 22, 27, 30, 45, 46, 47, 48

### Chapter 3: Techniques, Safety, and Infection Control

Mr. Ashraf Khan, age 45, unknown diagnosis 51, 57, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69

### Chapter 4: Documentation and Interprofessional Communication

Mr. Oscar Chavez, age 29, motor vehicle collision 71, 75, 78, 84, 85, 86, 87

### Chapter 5: Vital Signs and General Survey

Mr. Robert Sanders, age 55, atrial fibrillation 93, 96, 120, 122, 123, 124, 125

### Chapter 6: Pain Assessment

Ms. Ellen Bond, age 42, fibromyalgia 129, 137, 145, 146, 147, 148

### Chapter 7: Nutritional Assessment

Karen Pitoci, age 15, anorexia nervosa 152, 165, 170, 173, 174, 175

### Chapter 8: Assessment of Developmental Stages

Mrs. Amber Carr, Mr. Manuel Carr, and their adoptive children: Emily, age 2 months; Jacob, age 2; Madeline, age 5 180, 193, 194, 198, 200, 201, 202, 203

### Chapter 9: Mental Health, Violence, and Substance Use Disorder

Mr. Ryan Hart, age 75, alcohol misuse and bipolar disorder 205, 221, 229, 231, 232, 233

### Chapter 10: Cultural Assessment

Mr. Assad Farhan, age 54, type 2 diabetes 236, 247, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256

### Chapter 11: Skin, Hair, and Nails Assessment

Mr. Alexander Sholokhov, age 65, lower extremity infection 261, 273, 281, 282, 283, 284

### Chapter 12: Head and Neck Assessment, With Vision and Hearing Basics

Faye Davis-Pierce, age 21, hypothyroidism 312, 321, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332

### Chapter 13: Eye Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice

Mr. Ken Harris, age 61, glaucoma 338, 346, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363

### Chapter 14: Ear Assessment for Advanced and Specialty Practice

Chris Chow, age 6, otitis media 374, 383, 391, 393, 394, 395, 396

### Chapter 15: Nose, Sinuses, Mouth, and Throat Assessment

Ms. Elizabeth Murphy, age 89, *Candida albicans* 402, 417, 425, 427, 428, 429, 430

### Chapter 16: Thorax and Lung Assessment

Mr. Jason Lee, age 65, COPD exacerbation 445, 459, 472, 474, 475, 476, 477

### Chapter 17: Heart and Neck Vessels Assessment

Mrs. Francis Lewis, age 77, myocardial infarction 483, 498, 508, 510, 511, 512, 513

### Chapter 18: Peripheral Vascular and Lymphatic Assessment

Mr. Fred Rossi, age 88, peripheral arterial disease 523, 535, 544, 546, 547, 548

### Chapter 19: Breast and Axillae Assessment

Mrs. Theresa Randall, age 66, breast cancer 556, 567, 575, 577, 578, 579, 580

### Chapter 20: Abdominal Assessment

Mr. Thomas Renaud, age 41, gastrointestinal bleed 585, 598, 611, 613, 614, 615, 616

### Chapter 21: Musculoskeletal Assessment

Mrs. Gladys Begay, age 82, hip arthroplasty 624, 636, 658, 660, 661, 662, 663

### Chapter 22: Neurological and Mental Status Assessment

Mr. Steven Gardner, age 56, cerebrovascular accident 673, 688, 706, 709, 710, 711, 712

### Chapter 23: Male Genitalia and Rectal Assessment

Mr. John Muller, age 50, benign prostatic hypertrophy 722, 735, 744, 746, 747, 748, 749

### Chapter 24: Female Genitalia and Rectal Assessment

Ms. Teresa Nguyen, age 28, sexually transmitted infection 761, 777, 789, 791, 792, 793

### Chapter 25: Pregnancy

Ms. Michelle Sherman, age 19, Braxton Hicks contractions 807, 821, 829, 833, 834, 835, 836

### Chapter 26: Newborns and Infants

Keri Meadows, age 1 month, ineffective breast/chestfeeding 840, 848, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869

### Chapter 27: Children and Adolescents

Simon Chavez, age 4, impaired speech 878, 889, 902, 903, 904, 905

### Chapter 28: Older Adults

Mr. Ralph Monroe, age 76, Parkinson disease 909, 922, 929, 930, 931, 932

### Chapter 29: Assessment of the Hospitalized Adult

Mr. Scott Kim, age 59, stroke 939, 945, 950, 952, 953, 954, 955,

### Chapter 30: Head-to-Toe Assessment of the Adult

Mrs. Dorothy Jane Suleri, age 44, ulcerative colitis 959, 969, 980, 982, 983, 984, 985



UNIT

# 1

# Foundations of Nursing Health Assessment

- 1** The Nurse's Role in Health Assessment 3
- 2** The Health History and Interview 22
- 3** Techniques, Safety, and Infection Control 51
- 4** Documentation and Interprofessional Communication 71



# The Nurse's Role in Health Assessment

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Describe the role of the professional nurse in health assessment.
- 2 Demonstrate knowledge of the purposes of health assessment.
- 3 Explain the relationship of health assessment to teaching and health promotion.
- 4 Explain the nursing process, critical judgment thinking, and clinical in nursing care.
- 5 Demonstrate knowledge of the differences in the types and frequencies of assessments.
- 6 State the components of a comprehensive health assessment.
- 7 Describe organizing frameworks for collecting health assessment data.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Top Patient Findings: What Matters Most?

Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

Ms. Maria Ortiz (prefers Ms. Ortiz, pronouns she/her/hers), a 52-year-old Mexican American woman, has a follow-up appointment related to type 2 diabetes, which was diagnosed 2 weeks ago during an annual physical assessment. Her primary language is Spanish. Although she speaks English well, she has difficulty understanding complex medical terminology. Ms. Ortiz has been married for 30 years, and her three grown children live nearby.

Ms. Ortiz is 1.52 m (5 ft) tall, weighs 75 kg (165 lb), and has a body mass index (BMI) of 32.2. She eats a diet high in fats and starches. Her blood glucose levels at home have been elevated. She is otherwise healthy. Current vital signs are temperature 36.5°C (97.7°F) tympanic (ear route), right radial (wrist) pulse 82 beats/min, respirations 16 breaths/min, and blood pressure (BP) 138/92 mm Hg right arm. Medications include an oral hypoglycemic to lower blood sugar and a daily vitamin.

➤ Identify the top four patient findings that will require follow-up.

Patient Findings	Top Four Findings
Diagnosed 2 weeks ago with diabetes	
Married for 30 years	
BMI 32.2	
Elevated blood glucose	
Right radial pulse 82 beats/min	
BP 138/92 mm Hg right arm	

### Critical Thinking Challenge

- What is the role of the nurse in providing care for Ms. Ortiz at this visit?
- How is the nursing process used when performing Ms. Ortiz's care?
- What framework will be used to collect subjective and objective data?
- How will the nurse use priority setting frameworks to care for Ms. Ortiz?

## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

### ROLES OF THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE

“Nursing is the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations,” according to the American Nurses Association (ANA, 2021). This definition serves as the basis on which the standards of the professional nursing practice and the scope of nursing practice are structured. Nursing has a focus comprising four main goals:

1. To promote health
2. To prevent illness
3. To treat human responses to health or illness
4. To advocate for individuals, families, communities, and populations.

The *Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements* (ANA, 2015a) and *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (ANA, 2015b) further describe nursing and its associated practice standards. The *Code of Ethics* focuses on the conscience of the nurse and respect for the individual. It provides direction in the clinical setting. The four concepts in the *Code of Ethics* (2015a) include autonomy, beneficence (kindness), justice, and nonmaleficence (do no harm). The following concepts are included in the *Code of Ethics*:

- The nurse practices with compassion, dignity, and respect for every person.
- The nurse advocates for and protects the rights, health, and safety of the patient.
- The nurse takes action to provide optimal patient care, continue professional growth, advance the profession, and integrate social justice into practice.
- The nurse collaborates and communicates with other health professionals.

The *Scope and Standards of Practice* (ANA, 2015b) document describes nursing duties and works together with the

nursing process, including assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The process is used to promote health and prevent illness, reduce the risk of a disease, reinforce good habits, and maintain optimal functioning (Fig. 1.1).

Roles for the generalist nurse are derived from the discipline of nursing: provider of care, designer/manager/coordinator of care, and member of a profession (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2008).

#### PROVIDER OF CARE

Nurses provide direct care to help restore health for patients who are ill in hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, and schools. This is compared with medical doctors who focus on the physical aspects of diseases and prescribe medications or other treatments. Nurses focus on how diseases affect activity levels and abilities to perform tasks, as well as on how patients cope with their health issues and any related losses of function. Nurses often work together with primary care providers on medical diagnoses and collaborative problems. Independent nursing interventions include patient teaching, therapeutic communication, and physical procedures, such as turning patients or assisting them with ambulation. Advanced practice nurses may function autonomously and practice independently after licensure.

#### MANAGER OF CARE

Nurses are constantly making treatment decisions to manage and coordinate care. Nurses often spend more time with patients and their families than other healthcare providers do and thus know their issues more completely. Nurses communicate findings to appropriate people and document data to share information and identify trends. Referral of patients to other healthcare providers is made after appropriate assessment. To become aware of the assessments done before this referral, there is a feature, “SBAR: What Can I Do?” that includes information on collaborating with the



**Figure 1.1** Nurses promote health and treat responses to illness. (A) Nurses maintain optimal functioning in schools. (B) Hospital nurses promote healing.

interprofessional team” at the end of the chapters in this text. It uses the format of **S**ituation, **B**ackground, **A**nalysis, and **R**ecommendation (SBAR) to make suggestions to the team about what is needed for the patient's care. Documentation of care is described in the “Analyzing Changing Findings: Progress Note” feature, which uses SOAP note organization (subjective, objective, analysis, plan). Nurses use interprofessional communication and collaboration to improve patient health outcomes.

## MEMBER OF A PROFESSION

Nursing research and evidence-based practice can be traced back to Florence Nightingale in the mid-1800s. Today, nurses perform scholarship and research to provide care based on current evidence. Professional nursing practice is grounded in best practice, critical inquiry, and skilled questioning. Knowledge of patient care technologies and information systems is essential in the management of care. Nurses use systems to influence healthcare policy, finance, and regulatory agencies. Health promotion and disease prevention are necessary to improve health at both the individual and population levels (ANA, 2015b).

Nurses are advocates for the patient and the profession in their professional role. As advocates, nurses take responsibility to protect the legal and ethical rights of patients. Values and ethical principles are beliefs or ideals to which a person is committed. Professional core values guide nurses to provide safe, humane care. Nursing values (National League for Nursing, 2021) include the following:

- **CARING:** promoting health, healing, and hope in response to the human condition
- **INTEGRITY:** respecting the dignity and moral wholeness of every person without conditions or limitation
- **DIVERSITY:** affirming the uniqueness of and differences among persons, ideas, values, and ethnicities
- **EXCELLENCE:** cocreating and implementing transformative strategies with daring ingenuity

Nurses have a unique advantage in understanding and acting on the patient's behalf in the most holistic way. Both registered nurses (RNs) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) fulfill the roles described.

## The Registered Nurse

The RN is licensed nationally and practices independently within the scope of nursing practice. Depending on the location of practice, the RN may be required to fulfill continuing education and practice requirements. There are numerous employment opportunities for RNs, working wherever people need nursing care—hospitals, homes, schools, workplaces, and community centers. About two-thirds of RNs work in hospitals. Other common areas of practice include in the community or for public health, ambulatory care, nursing homes, and nursing education (ANA, 2015b).

RNs in hospitals develop assessment skills related to the specialty in which they practice. For example, in the

emergency department, nurses focus their assessment on life-threatening injuries and situations. In the intensive care setting, nurses assess patients using invasive monitoring equipment, such as an arterial line that goes into the patient's heart or an intracranial pressure line that goes into the patient's brain. In these specialized settings, an RN's role sometimes overlaps with advanced practice nurse roles.

## The Advanced Practice Registered Nurse

There are many opportunities for RNs to further their education and careers in a way that develops each individual's interests and uses their strengths and expertise. APRN is an umbrella term given to an RN who has achieved a bachelor's degree in nursing science, which includes educational and clinical practice requirements, as well as a minimum of a master of science in nursing (MSN) degree. The core curriculum for a master's degree (MSN) or doctorate of nursing practice (DNP) in nursing science includes advanced health assessment, advanced pathophysiology, and advanced pharmacology combined with the specialty-focused track. The advancement to a doctoral level of study supports an increasingly complex healthcare environment and contributes with the greatest level of scientific knowledge through research.

APRNs are governed and monitored by professional organizations, state law, and other regulations. The roles of the APRN include nurse practitioner (NP), certified nurse midwife (CNM), certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA), and clinical nurse specialist (CNS).

**Nurse Practitioner.** Through the core competencies of direct clinical practice, the APRN may care for patients throughout the patient's lifespan. The NP may also focus on primary care or acute care, with clinical track options in pediatrics, family practice, health of females gerontology, acute care, and psychiatric/mental healthcare.

**Certified Nurse Midwife.** The practice of the CNM has deep historical roots worldwide, with focus on gynecological care, pregnancy, birth, and contraceptive options. CNMs advocate for the patient to be an active participant in their healthcare choices.

**Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist.** CRNAs are considered the oldest specialty within nursing practice. CRNAs have the authority to select, obtain, or administer the anesthetics, adjuvant drugs, accessory drugs, and fluids necessary to manage anesthesia, to maintain the airway, and to correct abnormal responses to anesthesia or surgery.

**Clinical Nurse Specialist.** The CNS is experienced and knowledgeable in a specialty area. The CNS is an RN who, through study and practice at a graduate level, is expert in a selected clinical area of nursing. Opportunities for the teaching and consulting CNS can be found in critical care, cardiology, oncology, diabetic care, and psychiatry.



## REGISTERED NURSE VERSUS SPECIALTY OR ADVANCED PRACTICE ASSESSMENTS

The differences between the RN and the APRN assessments are included in each systems chapter of this text. At the beginning of each “Objective Cues” section, a table describes the usual general scope of practice for each role. This is based on the role of RNs and APRNs in Western countries, and each role varies by the specialty. For example, the RN practicing in the neurological intensive care area may be an expert in advanced neurological assessment, whereas an NP in family practice has infrequent experience in this area. An RN practicing in rural home healthcare or in a developing country may need to rely on percussion of the lungs, usually an advanced practice technique, because x-ray equipment is unavailable. Refer to current guidelines for the scope of practice in your area because the assessments vary depending upon the setting and specialty area.

## TEACHING AND HEALTH PROMOTION

Health behaviors are influenced by a person’s beliefs, culture, and perceptions, as well as competing demands in the person’s life. For example, a person with a goal of weight loss may be influenced by family finances, other family members, available time, and their previous success or failure losing weight. Health beliefs and experiences determine who is likely to practice healthy behaviors and why. A nursing assessment that includes the patient’s individual situation and experiences will assist in the development of focused health promotion activities (Murdaugh et al., 2019).

As a nurse, you assess patients for nutrition, fitness, mental health, safety, and stress. When these screening questions are asked, you follow up with more in-depth questions in higher risk areas. You collaborate with the patient and family to identify areas that they view as important.

## WELLNESS AND ILLNESS

Wellness is an integrated method of functioning oriented toward maximizing the potential of the individual. Illnesses are separate short or long events that may challenge a person’s desire for health. Most people fall somewhere between wellness and illness. The person who moves toward high-level wellness focuses on awareness, education, and growth. The person who moves toward illness and premature death develops signs and symptoms of disease or disabilities. Unfortunately, this is when most treatment occurs in the current healthcare system.

Health is more than merely the absence of illness. Nurses collaborate with individuals, families, and communities to promote higher levels of wellness.

## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: HEALTHY PEOPLE 2030

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021) has developed a national model for health promotion and

risk reduction called *Healthy People*. The goals of this project are to increase the length and quality of life for the population of the United States and to eliminate health disparities. Every 10 years, progress is evaluated, and the goals are restructured. They will be covered in more detail in each of the chapters. *Healthy People 2030*’s five main goals are to:

- Attain healthy, thriving lives and well-being free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death.
- Eliminate health disparities, achieve health equity, and attain health literacy to improve the health and well-being of all.
- Create social, physical, and economic environments that promote attaining the full potential for health and well-being for all.
- Promote healthy development, healthy behaviors, and well-being across all life stages.
- Engage leadership, key constituents, and the public across multiple sectors to take action and design policies that improve the health and well-being of all.

The three levels of interventions to promote healthy change are primary, secondary, and tertiary (Leavell & Clark, 1965):

- Primary prevention involves strategies aimed at preventing problems.
  - Immunizations, health teaching, safety precautions, and nutrition counseling are examples.
- Secondary prevention includes the early diagnosis of health problems and prompts treatment to prevent complications.
  - Vision screening, Pap smears, BP screening, hearing testing, scoliosis screening, and tuberculin skin testing are examples.
- Tertiary prevention focuses on preventing complications of an existing disease and promoting health to the highest level.
  - Diet teaching and exercise programs are examples.

## WHAT IS HEALTH ASSESSMENT?

Health assessment is “gathering information about the health status of the patient, analyzing and synthesizing those data, making judgments about nursing interventions based on the findings, and evaluating patient care outcomes” (AACN, 2008). This process is followed in each chapter of the book, beginning with data collection and ending with evaluating outcomes.

A health assessment includes both a health history and a physical assessment. According to the ANA (2015b),

An RN uses a systematic, dynamic way to collect and analyze data about a patient, the first step in delivering nursing care. Assessment includes not only physiological data, but also psychological, sociocultural, spiritual, economic, and life-style factors.

For example, a nurse’s assessment of a hospitalized patient in pain includes not only the physical causes and manifestations



of pain but also the patient's response—such as an inability to get out of bed, refusal to eat, withdrawal from family members, or anger at hospital staff.

The health history includes interviewing to collect the patient's past medical and surgical histories, lifestyle, and current symptoms. A comprehensive health history also includes nutrition, development, mental health, culture, and safety issues. Data that you collect during the physical assessment vary depending on the seriousness of a patient's condition, health history, and current symptoms. In an emergency, you collect information that will help pinpoint the source of the issues and treat current conditions. For healthy patients seeking a wellness checkup, you focus the assessment on screening for high-risk conditions (e.g., high BMI) and teaching and health promotion associated with common issues (e.g., nutrition and exercise).

You may also perform a health assessment to gain further insight into a patient's current condition and to establish a database against which future assessments can be measured. You identify patterns and trends to determine whether a patient's condition is improving or worsening. Instead of using one piece of data in isolation, you think logically to analyze how data are related and what interventions may be indicated. You evaluate outcomes, and the assessment becomes a continuous part of the nursing process.

## NURSING PROCESS

The nursing process is a systematic problem-solving approach to identifying and treating human responses to actual or potential health difficulties (ANA, n.d.). It serves as a framework for providing individualized care not only to individuals but also to families and communities. It is patient centered and focuses on solving problems and enhancing strengths. The nursing process is applicable to patients in all stages of the lifespan and in all settings.

The nursing process includes assessing the patient, analyzing data and making nursing diagnoses, determining patient outcomes or planning care, implementing, and then evaluating the patient's status to determine whether interventions were effective (Fig. 1.2).

### Assess

The nursing process begins with a complete and accurate health assessment to promote health at the highest level.

#### SAFETY ALERT

*All future care is based on the health assessment, so it is extremely important that health assessment data are complete and accurate. This is one of the most important skills that you will use as a nurse.*

The nursing process is not linear (i.e., progressing step-by-step). Rather, it involves interrelated and sometimes overlapping steps. As you collect assessment data, you may also provide emergency interventions. You set outcomes collaboratively with patients. These established priorities guide



**Figure 1.2** The phases of the nursing process are assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification or planning, implementation, and evaluation. Nurses apply these activities to the care of individuals, families, and communities.

not only the treatment plan but also the type of future assessments. For example, if a hospitalized patient's priority is sleep, then you may decide to eliminate taking vital signs every 4 hours during the night if the patient's condition is stable. You also evaluate results during an assessment; for example, checking patients for side effects of medications.

### Diagnose

According to the ANA (n.d.), diagnosis is the clustering of data to make a judgment or statement about the patient's difficulty or condition: "The nursing diagnosis is the nurse's clinical judgment about the patient's response to actual or potential health conditions or needs." The ANA supports that nursing diagnosis is the basis for a nurse's care plan because it reflects the pain a patient feels whether caused from a bodily function, outside-of-body factors, or complications of the combination of these two things.

The International Classification for Nursing Practice (ICNP) provides a set of terms that can be used to record the observations and interventions of nurses across the world (ICNP, 2019). The ICNP provides a framework for sharing data about nursing and for comparing nursing practice across settings. Table 1.1 has three common nursing diagnoses or hypotheses that relate to health maintenance. You will see and learn more about diagnoses in each chapter.

### Identify Outcomes

Outcome identification is the formation of measurable, realistic, patient-centered goals. Goals are broader than outcomes; for example, "Patient's pain is within acceptable limits." Goal identification provides for individualized care. For example, after giving a patient in acute pain the

**TABLE 1.1** HYPOTHESES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR PATIENT EDUCATION

Diagnosis or Hypothesis	Description	Assessment	Interventions
<b>Health-seeking behavior</b>	Actively seeking ways to move toward a higher level of positive health	Expressed desire to seek higher level of wellness; concern about current conditions on health status	Prioritize learner needs based on patient preferences. Emphasize positive health benefits of positive lifestyle behaviors.
<b>Impaired health maintenance</b>	Impaired abilities to select, implement, or look for assistance with healthy lifestyle behaviors	Lack of health-seeking behavior, lack of resources, lack of adaptive behaviors to changes	Assess feelings, values, and reasons for not following plan of care. Assess family, economic, and cultural patterns that influence plan of care.
<b>Acute health crisis</b>	Not regulating and integrating a treatment for illness into daily life	Did not take action to reduce risk factors; difficulty with prescribed regimen for treatment or prevention of complications	Encourage active participation. Review actions that are not therapeutic. May involve a treatment failure or complication that needs immediate attention.

prescribed pain medication, you assess their pain level. You ask the patient what level of pain is acceptable and discuss whether the dose of medication should be increased.

Patient outcomes are specific goals: they are realistic and measurable (Alfaro-LeFevre, 2017). For example, it may not be realistic for a patient to be completely free of pain, so an acceptable outcome is “patient states pain less than 2 on a 0-to-10 scale.” Establishing outcomes also helps you identify priorities for care, especially with complex issues.

The most common nursing outcomes are discussed in the “Clinical Judgment” section of each of the system-specific chapters in this text.

### Plan Care

Care planning activities include determining resources, targeting nursing interventions, and writing the plan of care. In addition to standard care and provider orders, the nursing care plan requires that you analyze the individual patient and their needs to provide individualized and holistic care. You communicate the care plan verbally and document it in the patient’s chart so that the next care provider is aware of the plan. The agency or institution where you work will determine whether the plan of care is documented in a care plan format or in a concept care map, case note, clinical pathway, teaching plan, or discharge plan. Regardless of format, the care planning document incorporates elements of the nursing process and critical thinking that nurses incorporate into the patient care.

### Implement

An intervention is defined as “any treatment, based upon clinical judgment and knowledge, that a nurse performs to enhance patient/client outcomes” (Butcher et al., 2018, p. xii). It is important for you to be aware of the standards of care within the agency where you work because these standards define expected practice (e.g., taking vital signs every 8 hours). Types of nursing interventions include assessment, education, supervision, coordination, referral, support, therapeutic communication, and technical skills.

The ICNP is a unified nursing language system that supports standard nursing documentation at the point of care.

The resulting data-based information can be used for planning and managing nursing care, financial forecasting, analysis of patient outcomes, and policy development (ICNP, 2019). The most common nursing interventions are discussed in the diagnostic reasoning of the system-specific chapters in this text.

### Evaluate Outcomes

The evaluation is the judgment of the effectiveness of nursing care in meeting the goals and outcomes. It is based on the patient’s responses to the interventions. The purpose of evaluation is to make judgments about the progress of the patient, analyze the effectiveness of nursing care, review potential areas for collaboration with and referral to other healthcare professionals, and monitor the quality of nursing care and its effect on the patient. As a nurse, you will assess the promotion of and barriers to goal attainment. Goals may be completely met, partially met, or completely unmet.

You will use your interviewing skills for subjective data collection and your physical assessment skills for objective data collection to effectively evaluate. You will use critical thinking throughout the nursing process to assess, diagnose, plan, implement, and evaluate care. This is known mnemonically as ADPIE.

### CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking in nursing (Alfaro-LeFevre, 2017):

- entails purposeful, outcome-directed (result-oriented) thinking;
- is driven by patient, family, and community needs;
- is based on the nursing process, evidence-based thinking, and the scientific method;
- requires specific knowledge, skills, and experience;
- is guided by professional standards and codes of ethics; and
- is constantly reevaluating, self-correcting, and striving to improve.

As a nurse, you are frequently involved in complex situations with multiple responsibilities. You are required to contemplate analysis, develop alternatives, and implement the best interventions. Critical thinking is essential to resolving

difficulties. If you do not think critically, then you will deliver incomplete or misdirected care. Critical thinking is also an essential skill needed to pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). Accreditation visitors to colleges of nursing and healthcare facilities look for evidence of critical thinking ability in nursing students.

## DIAGNOSTIC REASONING

The diagnostic reasoning process is based on critical thinking. Diagnostic reasoning includes gathering and clustering data to draw inferences and propose diagnoses or hypotheses. A seven-step process for diagnostic reasoning can be used in the context of health assessment (Weber & Kelley, 2018):

1. Identify strengths and abnormal data.
2. Cluster data.
3. Draw inferences.
4. Propose nursing diagnoses.
5. Check for defining characteristics.
6. Confirm or remove diagnoses.
7. Document conclusions.

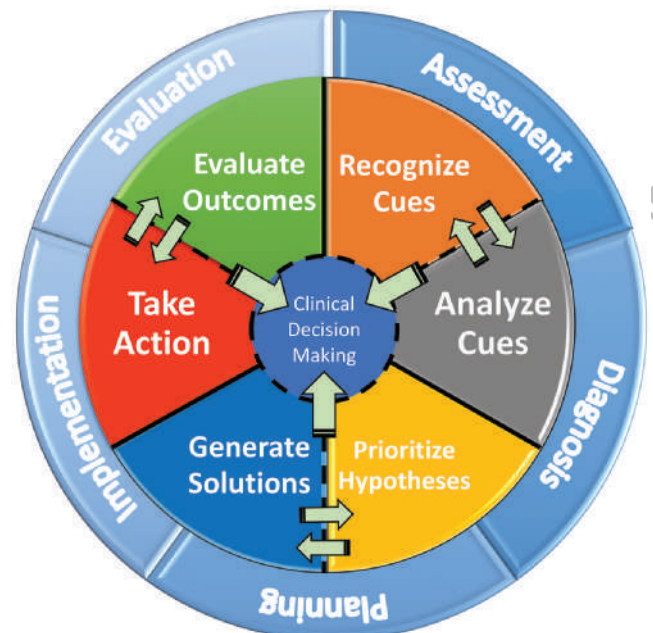
Collaborative problems are those that you are monitoring and require the expertise of other healthcare providers for interventions. An example of a collaborative problem is written as follows: “Potential Complications of Diabetes.” Diabetes is a medical diagnosis. As a nurse, you monitor for signs and symptoms of diabetes and notify the primary care provider if they are present. As a nurse, you also perform interventions in collaboration, such as glucose testing and insulin administration. Interprofessional collaboration is an important skill to learn by using both written and verbal communication. Examples of this important skill are covered in the “Analyzing Changing Findings: Progress Note” and “SBAR: Interprofessional Collaboration” sections of the case study.

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT

The combination of nursing process, critical thinking, and diagnostic reasoning contributes to a nurse's clinical judgment ability. Understanding the material does not always translate into sound clinical judgment skills (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2021). Your decisions matter in every unique situation, and the case studies in each chapter give you an opportunity to use your knowledge. The clinical judgment model used in the Next Generation NCLEX style questions (NGN style questions) contains the steps shown in Figure 1.3. The nurse forms hypotheses, prioritizes them, generates solutions, and then takes actions. The goal of this process is to direct you in implementing it in a way that will improve your patient's care. You will use this process as you answer the NGN case study questions in this chapter. See Box 1.1 for the steps involved.

## TYPES OF NURSING ASSESSMENTS

Three types of nursing assessments are common: emergency, comprehensive, and focused. Emergency and focused



**Figure 1.3** The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) defines clinical judgment as “An iterative decision-making process that uses nursing knowledge to: Observe and assess presenting situations; Identify a prioritized patient concern; and Generate the best possible evidence-based solutions in order to deliver safe patient care.”

assessments center on the immediate and highest priority problem. Comprehensive assessments are broad and complete. The amount and type of information vary depending on the patient's needs, purpose of data collection, healthcare setting, and the nurse's role.

## EMERGENCY AND URGENT ASSESSMENT

The emergency assessment involves a life-threatening or unstable situation, such as a patient who has experienced a critical traumatic injury (Smith & Bowden, 2017). Staff members use triage to determine the level of urgency by considering assessments based on the mnemonic A, B, C, D, E:

- A—Airway (with cervical spine protection if an injury is suspected)
- B—Breathing: rate and depth, use of accessory muscles
- C—Circulation: pulse rate and rhythm, skin color
- D—Disability: level of consciousness, pupils, movement
- E—Exposure

### SAFETY ALERT

*All life-threatening problems identified during the initial assessment require the initiation of critical interventions:*

- Assist with circulation (cardiopulmonary resuscitation if needed).
- Open the patient's airway.
- Assist the patient's breathing.
- Protect the cervical spine if the patient is injured.
- Ensure the disoriented or suicidal patient is safe.
- Provide pain management and sedation.

## BOX 1.1 NCLEX Clinical Judgment Measurement Model

**Recognize Cues**

*Do not connect cues with hypotheses just yet.*

Identify relevant and important information from different sources (e.g., medical history, vital signs).

- What information is relevant/irrelevant?
- What information is most important?
- What is of immediate concern?

**Analyze Cues**

*Consider multiple things that could be happening.*

Organize and link the recognized cues to the patient's clinical presentation.

- What patient conditions are consistent with the cues?
- Are there cues that support or contraindicate a particular condition?
- Why is a particular cue or subset of cues of concern?
- What other information would help establish the significance of a cue or set of cues?

**Prioritize Hypotheses**

*Rank the potential issues and think about phrases such as "most likely."*

Evaluate and rank hypotheses according to priority (urgency, likelihood, risk, difficulty, time, etc.).

- Which explanations are most/least likely?
- Which possible explanations are the most serious?

**Generate Solutions**

*Focus on goals and multiple potential interventions—not just the best one—that connect to those goals. Potential solutions could include collecting additional information.*

Identify expected outcomes and using hypotheses to define a set of interventions for the expected outcomes.

- What are the desirable outcomes?
- What interventions can achieve those outcomes?
- What should be avoided?

**Take Action**

*For "how" questions, ensure that specific elements from the scenario are what determines approach.*

Implement the solution(s) that address the highest priorities.

- Which intervention or combination of interventions is most appropriate?
- How should the intervention(s) be accomplished (performed, requested, administered, communicated, taught, documented, etc.)?

**Evaluate Outcomes**

*Focus on the efficacy of the intervention(s) from the previous items.*

Compare observed outcomes against expected outcomes.

- What signs point to improving/declining/unchanged status?
- Were the interventions effective?
- Would other interventions have been more effective?

Adapted with permission from National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2019). *Next Generation NCLEX News* (Winter 2019). [https://www.ncsbn.org/NGN\\_Winter19.pdf](https://www.ncsbn.org/NGN_Winter19.pdf)

You perform assessments and critical interventions simultaneously. Examples of life-threatening and urgent problems are provided in each chapter in the section on Emergency and Urgent Assessment.

**COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT**

The comprehensive assessment includes a complete health history and physical assessment. It is a physical similar to the one required for admission to school. In the clinic, the history may be obtained by having the patient initially fill out a written form with family history of illness, personal illness, and medical treatment or surgeries. You discuss the information with patients and clarify any incomplete or unclear areas. Note the dates of diagnoses and treatments along with the reason for taking medications; for example, if the patient is taking a heart medication for high BP or for a history of heart attack. A comprehensive history also includes a patient's perception of health, strengths to build upon, risk factors for illness, functional abilities, methods of coping, and support systems.

It is important to reconcile the medication list with what the patient is actually taking. If the patient is unable to

participate in data collection because of the urgency of the problem, then you may need to use secondary data sources for information, such as the patient's family members.

A comprehensive physical assessment includes all body systems and areas, usually in a head-to-toe format. This includes an assessment of the skin; head and neck; eyes; ears, nose, mouth, and throat; thorax and lungs; heart and neck blood vessels; arms and legs; breasts/chest; abdomen; musculoskeletal; and neurological systems. Rectal and genital assessments are optional. Comprehensive assessment is more in depth when performed by an APRN, as described in the last chapter of this text, Chapter 30, Head-to-Toe Assessment of Adult. The assessment for the nurse in the hospital is described in Chapter 29, Assessment of the Hospitalized Adult.

**FOCUSED ASSESSMENT**

A focused assessment is based on the patient's health issues. This type of assessment occurs in all settings. It usually involves one or two body systems and is smaller in scope than the comprehensive assessment but is more in depth on the specific issue(s). An example is a patient who presents to the clinic with a cough. The health history focuses on the



duration of the cough, associated symptoms such as wheezing or shortness of breath, and factors that relieve or worsen the cough. The physical assessment includes an evaluation of the nose and throat, auscultation of the lungs, and inspection of sputum. Both the APRN and hospital nurse perform these focused assessments based on the problem and the type of unit on which they are practicing.

## PRIORITY SETTING

Priority setting is an important skill in professional nursing practice. It is challenging to learn because there are many factors involved. You use clinical experience, knowledge, expertise, and judgment to determine priorities. Even expert nurses sometimes prioritize in different ways based on their experiences.

Life-threatening issues always take priority: for example, circulation, airway, and breathing take priority over elevated temperature. Another example of a situation that requires immediate attention is a patient at risk for human violence or suicide. If the patient is stable, then your priority is an issue that is very important to the patient or something on which you are spending a lot of time.

### CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

**When prioritizing, you first address any life-threatening situations and then other issues that need immediate attention.**

## FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT

The frequency of assessment varies with the patient's needs, purpose of data collection, and healthcare setting. A patient in a long-term care setting may need a comprehensive assessment once a month, whereas a patient in an acute hospital setting may require an assessment once per shift (Fig. 1.4). Patients in intensive care settings have vital signs and a focused assessment hourly and sometimes even more often. A facility's standard of care prescribes minimum frequency, so it is important for you to identify those standards for the unit and facility in which you are working.

Use judgment to collect data at other times, based on a change in the patient's condition. Patients have focused assessments following treatments to monitor their effectiveness. For example, if your patient who is short of breath is given an inhaler, then listen to lung sounds after the treatment to see if there has been an improvement in wheezing. You also perform assessments to monitor for adverse effects from interventions; for example, assessing for pedal pulses after a procedure in which the femoral artery is punctured and there is a risk of bleeding. Perform a focused assessment if the patient's condition changes.

Well visits are also an important component of health assessment. Periodic health assessment focuses on the most



**Figure 1.4** In this emergency, the assessment is combined with interventions and priority setting.

common screening and prevention services for four age groups: (1) birth to 10 years, (2) 11 to 24 years, (3) 25 to 64 years, and (4) 65 years and older. Patients are seen more frequently in the youngest years to monitor growth and development and in later years for the treatment of acute and chronic illnesses.

## LIFESPAN ISSUES

A comprehensive screening assessment includes cognitive and emotional development in addition to physical growth. Your aim is to identify expected growth and development patterns, expected variations, and deviations. Growth and development are marked by rapid spurts from infancy through adolescence. Development proceeds more slowly from adolescence through 25 years of age. Motor development occurs rapidly following maturation of the nervous system from birth through school age. Language skills develop rapidly in toddlers and preschool children as vocabulary increases and sentences become more complex. In this text, information on the older adult is included in each chapter; pregnant people and younger populations are covered in separate chapters in Unit 4.

## CULTURAL VARIATIONS AND HEALTH DISPARITIES

Knowledge of different cultures is essential for nurses working in all areas and settings of practice. *Cultural competence* refers to the complex combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that a healthcare provider uses to deliver care that considers the total context of the patient's situation across cultural boundaries.

*Culture* is defined as the traits that a group of people share and pass from one generation to the next, including values, beliefs, attitudes, and customs. Subcultures exist within larger cultural groups, so it is important to learn what the patient's specific beliefs or needs are within the larger context.



You need to recognize how each patient interacts with cultures that may differ from their immediate cultures and the extent that they identify with parallel cultures. Cues include dress, food, family, and religion. This information is integrated into each chapter.

## COMPONENTS OF THE HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Nurses use communication skills to gather data during the patient interview. In addition to speaking with the patient (verbal communication), you also observe the patient's body position, facial expression, and eye contact (nonverbal

communication). Introduce yourself initially and then explain the purpose of the interview. Confidentiality is important: you must obtain permission from the patient for other people to be present during the assessment, otherwise you will need to ask present to step out for a few moments to allow some privacy. More information about the interview is found in Chapter 2.

The purpose of the health history is to collect family and personal history of risk factors and past issues. Review the family history of medical difficulties or mental health issues with patients. Begin the personal history with biographical data on date of birth, primary language spoken, and allergies. A detailed history includes data on all systems, psychosocial and mental health, and functional status. Document the dates of problems along with treatments and treatment outcomes.

## SUBJECTIVE CUES

The primary source for subjective data collection is the patient. Subjective data are based on patient experiences and perceptions. The individual describes the feelings, sensations, or expectations; you then document them as subjective data

or put them in quotes. Your role relative to subjective data collection is to gather information to improve the patient's health status and to help determine the cause of the patient's current symptoms.



### CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

#### Collecting Subjective Data: Where Do I Start?

#### Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

##### Nurse's Notes

Remember Ms. Ortiz. She was seen in the clinic for newly diagnosed diabetes. The following conversation provides an example of an effective communication style for collecting subjective data. The nurse asks open-ended questions that provide Ms. Ortiz with an opportunity to express and validate concerns.

**Nurse:** Hello, Ms. Ortiz. How are you doing today? Tell me how things have been going for you.

**Ms. Ortiz:** (pauses) Well, 2 weeks ago, they told me that I had sugar diabetes. It runs in my family, so I shouldn't be too surprised. I just haven't gotten used to this new diet or activity or the medicines. I would like to know more.

**Nurse:** Tell me more about your concerns.

**Ms. Ortiz:** Well, my mother was diabetic, and she couldn't eat sugar. But they said that I can have a little dessert—just a little though. But the dietitian seemed to be more concerned about the cheese that I add to my refried beans.

**Nurse:** The dietitian is thinking about the long-term effects of the fat in the cheese because it contains calories and cholesterol that can damage your blood vessels and lead to difficulties over time. It's a different way of thinking about it than it used to be.

**Ms. Ortiz:** Yes, it doesn't make sense to me... (looks down) But things always change. Like this... I didn't think that I would end up with diabetes, too.

**Nurse:** Yes, it sounds like this is a little overwhelming to you.

- Complete the following sentence by selecting the correct options from each list.

The priority problem for this patient is \_\_\_\_\_ (list 1) as evidenced by the patient's \_\_\_\_\_ (list 2).

##### List 1

diabetes management with new diagnosis

diet restrictions for sugar and fat

family history of sugar diabetes

##### List 2

expressed concern over family history of diabetes

lacked understanding of sugar and fat restrictions

requested diet, activity, and medication information

### Critical Thinking Challenge

- Is this an example of an emergency, comprehensive, or focused assessment? Provide examples of the different types of assessments.
- How is the role of the RN different from that of the APRN when working with Ms. Ortiz? Consider assessment, health promotion, and teaching.
- What parts of the nursing process are used in the conversation? Give examples.

## OBJECTIVE CUES

The physical assessment follows the history and focused interview and includes objective data, which are measurable. You observe the patient's general appearance; assess vital signs; listen to the heart, lungs, and abdomen; and assess peripheral circulation. Chapters 11 to 24 include focused techniques specific to each body system. Only the most important screening assessments for each system are included in the head-to-toe assessment because it is too overwhelming and time-consuming to complete all focused techniques at once. Use clinical judgment to decide which additional focused assessments to perform based on the individual patient.

### DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION: PROGRESS NOTE AND SBAR

Documentation of both subjective and objective findings is essential to meet legal requirements and also communicate findings to others. Accurate documentation provides a baseline so that changes can be noted between assessments. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, 2003) regulates the security and privacy of information. Confidentiality of documentation is essential, and only information pertinent to the care of the patient is shared. More information on documentation is found in Chapter 4. This text uses the SOAP note format, although other formats also document nursing thinking. Patient examples of SOAP documentation are included in each chapter.

Communication of assessment data is also verbal. Care of the patient is collaborative, and nurses use an organized method when communicating with other healthcare providers. Nurses describe the situation, background, and assessment data to make recommendations about the treatment that is indicated—a system known as SBAR communication—situation, background, assessment, and recommendation (IHI, 2018). Nurses also use an organized method when giving a report between shifts or when transferring (handing off) patients to other departments, such as when a patient is sent to the operating room (IHI, 2018). More information about SBAR and examples are included in Chapter 4 and the systems chapters.

Since the discovery of safety lapses resulting in patient deaths in hospitals, efforts have been made to improve this very large problem by bolstering interprofessional communication. Interprofessional collaborative practice competency domains include the following:

- Values/ethics for interprofessional practice
- Roles/responsibilities
- Interprofessional communication
- Teams and teamwork

“Front-line” health professionals identify the importance of clearly describing one's own professional role and responsibilities. It is also essential to understand other healthcare workers' roles and responsibilities. A common language for interprofessional communication is the Team-STEPPS training program, which endorses practices such as SBAR, call-out, and check-back (see Chapter 4). The goal is to have communication that is clearly expressed and understood.

In this text, the examples of documentation (SOAP note) and verbal communication (SBAR) all use a shared medical language that is learned by team professionals. Although the medical terminology is challenging to build, it is essential to learn and use so that others can understand you clearly.

## FRAMEWORKS FOR HEALTH ASSESSMENT

There are three major frameworks for organizing assessment data: functional systems, head-to-toe system, and body systems (Table 1.2). All these methods provide an organizing framework so that no important assessment data are overlooked. Each type begins with a general survey of the patient, vital signs, and level of distress. Developing a consistent and organized approach is more important than considering which system to use.

### FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

A functional assessment focuses on functional patterns that all humans share: health perception and health management, activity and exercise, nutrition and metabolism, elimination, sleep and rest, cognition and perception, self-perception and self-concept, roles and relationships, coping and stress

**TABLE 1.2** COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

Functional Systems	Head-to-Toe System	Body System(s)
Nutrition and metabolism	Head and neck	Neurological and cardiovascular
Cognitive perceptual	Eyes and ears	Neurological
Nutrition and metabolism	Nose, mouth, and throat	Gastrointestinal and respiratory
Activity exercise	Thorax and lungs	Respiratory
Activity exercise	Cardiac	Cardiovascular
Activity exercise	Peripheral vascular	Cardiovascular
Sexuality and reproduction	Breast	Reproductive
Nutrition and metabolism, sexuality and reproduction, elimination	Abdominal	Gastrointestinal, urinary, and reproductive
Activity exercise	Musculoskeletal	Musculoskeletal
Cognitive perceptual	Neurological	Neurological
Sexuality and reproduction	Male or female genitalia	Reproductive
Sexuality and reproduction, elimination	Anus, rectum, and prostate	Gastrointestinal and reproductive
Health perception, sleep, cognition, self-perception, roles, coping, sexuality, value	Functional health status	Mental health

tolerance, sexuality and reproduction, and values and beliefs (Gordon, 1993). Nurses often use the functional patterns to collect subjective data and a head-to-toe approach for the physical assessment.

### HEAD-TO-TOE ASSESSMENT

A head-to-toe assessment is the most organized system for gathering comprehensive physical data. It is very inefficient to collect physical data by functional status because data in one

functional area are collected from different parts of the body. For example, peripheral circulation is assessed in both the arms and the legs. It is more organized to proceed from head to toe rather than assess the arms and legs and then come back to listen to the heart and lungs. When exposing the chest, both the heart and the lungs are auscultated. The chest is covered, then the abdomen is assessed and covered, and finally, the legs and feet are assessed. You can see how this method is more efficient in addition to providing more modesty for patients.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Documenting Changing Findings: What Could It Mean?

#### Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

#### Nurse's Notes

Alert and oriented. Skin pink, warm, and dry. Appears with increased weight and high BMI, good personal hygiene, appears stated age. BP 138/78 mm Hg, pulse 82 beats/min, and respirations 16 breaths/min. Height 1.52 m (5 ft), weight 75 kg (165 lb), and BMI 32.2. Recent blood glucose 260 mg/dl and hemoglobin A1c of 7.5%.

- For each finding below, check the appropriate box to indicate if the finding is consistent with the nursing diagnoses of obesity, diabetes, and risk for nutritional excess. Each finding may support more than one diagnosis.

Patient Findings	Obesity	Diabetes	Risk for Nutritional Excess
BMI 32.2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Takes oral hypoglycemic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recent blood glucose 260 mg/dl	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hemoglobin A1c of 7.5%	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: Each column must have at least one response selected.

## BODY SYSTEMS APPROACH

A body systems assessment approach is a logical tool for organizing data when documenting and communicating findings. This method promotes critical thinking and allows you to analyze findings as you cluster similar data. Data from

the functional and head-to-toe assessments are reorganized. If the patient with shortness of breath is also cyanotic and wheezing, then you suspect a respiratory issue. Rather than identifying one piece of data in isolation, a systems approach allows you to cluster similar data to identify issues.

## CLINICAL JUDGMENT

You must use a variety of cues from both subjective and objective data to establish priorities of care based on the patient's health problems and analyze what they mean. *Priority setting* is the ability to make decisions about the rank order in which nursing actions should be taken using nursing judgment (ATI, n.d.). To prioritize what comes first, think of four frameworks: what is most life-threatening, airway–breathing–circulation, safety risks, and least invasive interventions. Three other frameworks are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, nursing process, and urgent versus chronic condition.

### DECIDING WHAT TO DO FIRST

Critical thinking, decision-making, prioritization, and time management are four skills necessary for nurses to be able to provide nursing care in an efficient and safe manner (ATI, n.d.).

Critical thinking is the process of analyzing and evaluating information. It leads to accurate care planning and delivery. Decision-making is the process by which a course of action is determined. The course of action may be in response to an actual or potential health threat. Priority setting is the organization of activities according to the order in which they should be done. Time management is used in the clinical environment, where the nurse decides how to cluster and organize care. It is making the best use of time to complete tasks.

### PRIORITY SETTING

Nurses must continuously set and reset priorities to meet the needs of multiple patients and to maintain patient safety. Priority setting requires decisions about the order in which patients are seen and assessments are completed. It also factors into when interventions are provided and how patient care is completed. Prioritize in the following order (ATI, n.d.):

- Systemic before local (“life before limb”)
- Interventions for a patient in shock over interventions for a patient with a localized limb injury
- Acute (less opportunity for physical adaptation) before chronic (greater opportunity for physical adaptation)

- Care of a patient with a new injury/illness (or acute exacerbation of a previous illness) over the care of a patient with chronic illness
- Actual problems before potential future problems
- Administration of medication to a patient experiencing acute pain over a patient with chronic pain
- The timing of administration of antidiabetic and antimicrobial medications as more important than administration of some other medications
- Signs of medical emergencies and complications (stroke, heart attack) versus expected patient findings.

### PRIORITY SETTING FRAMEWORKS

There are several ways to prioritize patient care in the clinical setting. Five to six frameworks might be used on any given day. Priority setting is a complex skill that needs to be put into context and takes several years to develop at an expert level. When answering questions on tests and the NCLEX exam, read through the answers to see if the question is asking you to use a specific framework to prioritize. For example, if a question asks, “What will you do first?” and the answers include assess, diagnose, plan, and evaluate, then know that the question uses the nursing process framework. If a question asks, “Which patient will you see first?” and the answers include symptoms of airway, breathing, and circulation, then know that this is an ABCD (airway, breathing, circulation, disability) question (and choose airway first).

### MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

The nurse should consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs when prioritizing interventions. The five levels of Maslow's hierarchy, in order of priority, are physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. For example, the nurse should prioritize a patient's need for airway, oxygenation (or breathing), circulation, and potential for disability over need for shelter. The nurse should also prioritize a need for a safe and secure environment over a need for family support.



## URGENT AND ACUTE VERSUS CHRONIC

Always identify any life- or limb-threatening condition and intervene before continuing with further assessments. Focus on the urgent problem at the beginning of each assessment, then focus the assessment and take action. You may need to work on interventions as you do further assessments and get assistance as needed. Rapid response teams save lives, and they know when it is appropriate to call for extra help. As you answer questions on tests, think of the “red flags” for high-risk conditions, such as warning signs of stroke and heart attack, and shock. These urgent conditions are identified at the beginning of each subjective cues section for each body system with a “safety alert.”

## AIRWAY, BREATHING, CIRCULATION, DISABILITY FRAMEWORK

The ABCD framework identifies the three basic needs for sustaining life in order. The severity of symptoms should also be considered when determining priorities. A severe circulation problem may take priority over a minor breathing problem (ATI, n.d.). An open airway is necessary for breathing, so it is the highest priority. You should remember this from cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Breathing is necessary for oxygenation of the blood to occur. Circulation is necessary for oxygenated blood to reach the body's tissues. Disability addressing the high priority given for dehydration, coma, and convulsion. Exposure (“E” can be added) means avoid exposure to environmental hazards.

Priority interventions for ABCD include:

- **Airway:** Identify an airway concern (obstruction, stridor), establish a patent airway if indicated, and recognize that 3 to 5 minutes without oxygen causes irreversible brain damage secondary to cerebral anoxia.
- **Breathing:** Assess the effectiveness of the patient's breathing (apnea, depressed respiratory rate) and intervene as appropriate (reposition, administer Narcan).
- **Circulation:** Identify circulation concern (hypotension, dysrhythmia, inadequate cardiac output, compartment syndrome) and institute appropriate actions to reverse or minimize circulatory alteration.
- **Disability:** Assess for current or evolving disability (neurological deficits, stroke in evolution) and implement action to slow down the development of disability.
- **Exposure:** Keep patient warm, identify all injuries and threats, and avoid hypothermia.

## SAFETY/RISK REDUCTION

First evaluate the environment for a safety risk. For example, is there a finding that suggests a risk for airway obstruction, hypoxia, bleeding, infection, or injury? Next ask, “What's the risk to the patient?” and “How significant is the risk compared to other posed risks?” Give priority to responding to whatever finding poses the greatest (or most imminent) risk to the patient's physical well-being.

## NURSING PROCESS

Use the nursing process to gather pertinent information before making a decision regarding a plan of action. Remember ADPIE: assess, diagnose, plan, implement, and evaluate. An evaluation is an assessment performed after an intervention is completed. An assessment is initially performed to start the diagnostic reasoning and care planning process. For example, if you are given a patient with a low BP, then you will want to collect more data to try to diagnose the problem before calling the provider for orders for an intravenous (IV) fluid.

## SURVIVAL POTENTIAL

Use this framework for situations in which health resources are extremely limited, such as a mass casualty and disaster triage (Clarkson & Williams, 2020):

- **Priority 1 (Red)** is serious but salvageable life-threatening injury/illness. This category includes burns, severe bleeding, heart attack, breathing impaired, and internal injuries. They are assigned a priority (Red) code and first priority for treatment and transportation.
- **Priority 2 (Yellow)** is a moderate to serious injury/illness and not immediately life-threatening. These are victims with potentially serious injuries, such as fractures.
- **Priority 3 (Green)** is “walking-wounded.” These victims are not seriously injured and are quickly escorted to a staging area out of the “hot zone” to await delayed evaluation and transportation.
- **Non-Priority 4 (Blue)** are those victims with critical and potentially fatal injuries and not expected to survive, so no treatment or transportation.

## LEAST RESTRICTIVE INTERVENTIONS

Select interventions that maintain patient safety while posing the least amount of restriction to the patient (ATI, n.d.). For example, if a patient has low BP due to dehydration, then attempt to give oral fluids before IV fluids. In a patient with a high fall risk, move the patient closer to the nurses' work area rather than apply restraints.

## USING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Evidence-based practice is an approach to patient care that minimizes intuition and personal experience and relies on research findings and high-grade scientific support. Evidence-based practice helps solve common problems through the following four steps:

1. Clearly identify the issue or difficulties based on an accurate analysis of current nursing knowledge and practice.
2. Search the literature for relevant research.
3. Evaluate the research evidence using established criteria governing scientific merit.
4. Choose interventions and justify the selection with the most valid evidence.



There are many ways to use research and evidence to provide holistic care to patients. The National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR), formed in 1986, greatly increased the visibility and funding opportunities for nursing research. The International Honor Society for Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau, has also increased its capacity to support and disseminate nursing scholarships for nursing research. The Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) is a database with a focus on nursing research.

Some evidence is evaluated by performing clinical trials, such as measuring the accuracy of a new oral thermometer against core temperature. If there are several clinical trials, a systematic review of the quality trials becomes the standard criterion. The Cochrane Database, available in most medical libraries, is considered the most complete and accurate collection of systematic reviews. The National Guidelines Clearinghouse also has recommendations based on clinical evidence. PubMed, a search engine that primarily accesses MEDLINE Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online, or MEDLINE, is another website for obtaining

the most current evidence. Many nursing facilities are implementing programs in which nurses develop a clinical question and find the best evidence to plan care. In this way, nurses base individual patient decisions on the best existing evidence rather than on their personal experience. See Box 1.2 for a list of these websites and those in the preceding paragraph.

### BOX 1.2 Resources to Support Research and Evidence-Based Practice

- Cochrane Database: [cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/about-cdsr](http://cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/about-cdsr)
- Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL): [ebsco.com/products/research-databases/cinahl-complete](http://ebsco.com/products/research-databases/cinahl-complete)
- International Honor Society for Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau: [nursingsociety.org](http://nursingsociety.org)
- National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR): [ninr.nih.gov](http://ninr.nih.gov)
- PubMed: [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/](http://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Analyzing Changing Findings: Progress Note

#### Nurse's Notes

The initial subjective and objective data collection is completed for Ms. Ortiz, and the nurse has spent time reviewing findings and results. This information now needs to be documented. The following nursing note illustrates how subjective and objective data are clustered, analyzed, and communicated in the form of a SOAP note based on the nursing process. Subjective and objective data are part of the assessment, the analysis is the diagnosis, and the plan includes the planning, implementation, and evaluation.

**SUBJECTIVE:** "I just haven't gotten used to this new diet."

**OBJECTIVE:** Alert and oriented. Skin pink, warm, and dry. Appears with weight of high BMI, good personal hygiene, appears stated age. BP 138/78 mm Hg, pulse 82 beats/min, and respirations 16 breaths/min. Current medications include an oral hypoglycemic medication and daily vitamin. Expressing concerns about diet and intake of sugar and fat. Typical diet is high in starch and fat and low in fresh fruits and vegetables.

**ANALYSIS:** Health-seeking behaviors related to new diagnosis and medication.

**PLAN:** Perform teaching on diet and safety related to potential hypoglycemia from oral hypoglycemic medication. Follow up at next visit. Refer to educator for classes.

### Critical Thinking Challenge

- What priority general and focused assessments will you suggest during today's visit?
- What type of subjective and physical assessment will you perform at her next visit?
- How will you evaluate Ms. Ortiz's assessment considering her culture, religion, native language, and family?

## GENERATE SOLUTIONS



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

## Interprofessional Collaboration: What Can I Do?

## Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

## Nurse's Notes

Ms. Ortiz has a follow-up appointment related to type 2 diabetes, which was diagnosed 2 weeks ago during an annual physical assessment.

**SITUATION:** Her primary language is Spanish. Although her English skills are good, she has difficulty understanding complex medical terminology. Ms. Ortiz has been married for 30 years, and her three grown children live nearby.

**BACKGROUND:** Medications include an oral hypoglycemic to lower blood sugar and a daily vitamin. She expresses concern over a family history of diabetes. She has a lack of understanding of sugar and fat restrictions in her diet. Height 1.52 m (5 ft), weight 75 kg (165 lb), and BMI 32.2. Recent blood glucose 260 mg/dl and hemoglobin A1c of 7.5%.

**ASSESSMENT:** Diabetes management with new diagnosis. Diet restrictions for sugar and fat. Needs medication management.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Educate on diet, activity, and medication information. Teach about medication in collaboration with the pharmacist. Prioritize safety with potential low blood sugar reaction to medication. Increase knowledge of dietary regime in collaboration with the dietitian. Promote exercise in balance with diet and medication after they have become more stable. Physical therapy can be involved in this plan when she returns for her next visits.

- For each potential nursing intervention, place a check mark in the appropriate column to specify whether the intervention is indicated, nonessential, or contraindicated for the care of the patient.

Potential Intervention	Indicated	Nonessential	Contraindicated
Teach about medication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase knowledge of dietary regime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: Each column must have only one response selected.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

## Plan the Care: What Will I Do?

## Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

## Nurse's Notes

The nurse uses this assessment data to formulate a nursing care plan for Ms. Ortiz. After the interventions are completed, the nurse will reevaluate her and document the findings in the chart to show critical thinking. This is often in the form of a care plan or case note similar to the one below.

Diagnose	Plan Outcomes	Implement	Rationale	Evaluate Outcomes
Health-seeking behaviors (related to new diagnosis and medication)	The patient states what to do for symptoms of hypoglycemia.	Discuss signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia. Discuss what to do if the patient is hypoglycemic, and provide a list of appropriate foods to increase blood glucose level.	Written information reinforces verbal information and can be used as a resource once the patient is at home.	Patient stated signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia. Patient named four foods that contain 10–15 g fast-acting carbohydrates. Patient will bring questions to next clinic visit.

- The nurse has received orders from the healthcare provider. Identify the three orders that the nurse should perform immediately.

- Discuss what to do if the patient is hypoglycemic.
- Provide a list of appropriate foods to increase blood glucose level.
- Make appointment for follow-up after 2 weeks.
- Discuss signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia.



## CLINICAL JUDGMENT CASE

### Evaluating Outcomes: Did It Help?

#### Next Generation NCLEX Style Question

Think about how you built your knowledge of a nurse's role while interviewing Ms. Ortiz. Notice how you modified and individualized her assessment based on your new knowledge.

#### Nurse's Notes

During Ms. Ortiz's assessment, you noted that she was overwhelmed but was willing to learn about her newly diagnosed diabetes. Her physical examination showed that she appeared to have a high BMI. Current medications include an oral hypoglycemic medication and daily vitamin. Recent blood glucose 260 mg/dl and hemoglobin A1c of 7.5% are unchanged. She was expressing concerns about diet and intake of sugar and fat. The nurse identified the safety issue of the side effect of low blood sugar as a priority.

Ms. Ortiz was reassessed following patient teaching. She stated signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia, named foods that contain fast-acting carbohydrates, and will bring questions to her next clinic visit.

Note how you used Ms. Ortiz's condition to prioritize, critically think, apply clinical judgment, and intervene. Weight reduction and better nutrition are needed, but these things can be discussed after safety issues are addressed. Nursing, nursing students, and professional nurses have an opportunity to uniquely affect the lives of others in this way. It is both a responsibility and a privilege to learn to function within this nursing role and provide excellent care to patients.

➤ The nurse has performed the interventions as ordered by the healthcare provider. Select the assessment findings that indicate improvement in the patient's condition. These findings are part of the outcomes that are evaluated to see if the interventions are working.

- ☐ Stated signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia
- ☐ Recent blood glucose 260 mg/dl
- ☐ Named four foods that contain 10–15 g fast-acting carbohydrates
- ☐ Stated she will bring questions to next clinic visit
- ☐ Hemoglobin A1c of 7.5%

### Key Points: You've Got This!

- The role of the professional nurse is to promote health, prevent illness, treat human responses, and advocate for patients.
- Nurses are providers, designers, managers, and coordinators of care as well as advocates and educators.
- Nursing values include caring, diversity, integrity, and excellence.
- Health can be conceptualized as a point between wellness and illness, as either a high or a low level of health.
- *Healthy People* is a U.S. government initiative to focus on health promotion and risk reduction strategies.
- The four main goals of nursing are to promote health, prevent illness, treat human responses to health and illness, and advocate for individuals, families, and communities.
- Steps of the nursing process include assessing, diagnosing, setting goals and outcomes, planning, intervening, and evaluating.
- Diagnostic reasoning is a process by which nurses use critical thinking to cluster the assessment information and to draw inferences and propose diagnoses.
- The clinical judgment model used in the NGN style questions (1) forms hypotheses, (2) prioritizes them, (3) generates solutions, and then (4) takes actions.
- Types of assessments are emergency, comprehensive, and focused assessments.
- Subjective data are based on the patient's experiences and perceptions.
- Objective data are measurable and usually collected as part of the physical assessment.
- Organizing frameworks for assessment include functional, head-to-toe, and body systems.
- Evidence-based nursing relies on research findings and high-grade scientific support, including CINAHL, Cochrane Database, and MEDLINE.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. A patient is having adverse effects resulting from a medication. The nurse calls the primary care provider to request a change in the medication order. The nurse is functioning as a(n)  
A. educator.  
B. advocate.  
C. organizer.  
D. counselor.
2. Nurses advocate for underserved populations to reduce health disparities. This promotes  
A. autonomy.  
B. altruism.  
C. respect.  
D. human dignity.
3. Nurses belong to the ANA as part of their  
A. ongoing professional responsibility.  
B. role as manager of care.  
C. wellness promotion for patients.  
D. cultural education activities.
4. The purpose of health assessment is to  
A. obtain subjective and objective data.  
B. intervene to correct difficulties.  
C. outline appropriate care.  
D. determine whether interventions are effective.
5. The nurse documents the following information in a patient's chart: "Cough and deep breathe every hour while awake." This is an example of  
A. evidence-based nursing.  
B. priority setting.  
C. comprehensive assessment.  
D. nursing interventions.
6. The nurse provides teaching about smoking cessation to a 20-year-old patient. The nurse assesses that the patient is concerned because their father died from lung cancer. Which theory would the nurse most likely use when providing teaching to this patient?  
A. Health belief model  
B. Diagnostic reasoning model  
C. Cultural competence model  
D. Body systems model
7. Which of the following processes is the most important when providing nursing care to a patient who is ill?  
A. Writing outcomes  
B. Performing a focused assessment  
C. Collecting objective data  
D. Using clinical judgment.
8. A patient is admitted to a hospital for surgery for colon cancer. What type of assessment is the nurse most likely to perform on admission?  
A. Emergency  
B. Focused  
C. Comprehensive  
D. Illness
9. Which of the following are the components of a comprehensive health assessment?  
A. Nursing diagnoses  
B. Goals and outcomes  
C. Collaborative problems  
D. Examination of body systems
10. The nurse conducts the health history based on the patient's responses to the medical diagnosis. This type of framework is based on the  
A. functional framework.  
B. objective framework.  
C. coordinator framework.  
D. collaborative framework.

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