MODULE 7

The Function of Physical Examination

Introduction

The history and the physical exam provide much of the information known about the patient's health status.

As a practical nurse, you may be called upon to assist the physician or other health care providers during a physical examination.

You should know the basics of the examination to have the appropriate equipment and supplies on hand, so that you may place the patient in the proper position and drape him correctly.

The purposes for performing a physical examination are as follows;

- To determine the patient's level of health or physiological function.
- To arrive at a tentative diagnosis when there is a health problem or disease.
- To confirm a diagnosis of disease or dysfunction.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of prescribed medical treatment and therapy.

After completing this lesson, the learner should be able to:

- ✓ Cite the purposes for performing a physical examination.

The physical examination can be performed by the following healthcare care providers;

- ✓ Physician
- ✓ nurse practitioner
- ✓ physician assistant

The healthcare provider makes specific and general observations as he examines the patient from head to toe.

The examination includes all of the following areas:

Throat	neck
eyes	chest
ears	breasts
nose	abdomen
mouth	extremities

A vaginal or rectal examination is performed if indicated.

The purposes for draping the patient during a physical examination are as follows:

- To prevent unnecessary exposure of the patient's body.
- To help the patient relax –an embarrassed patient will be tense and less cooperative.
- To prevent chilling – the frames will provide warmth.

The Function of the Practical Nurse

Learning Outcomes

This lesson will enable the learner to:

- ✓ Cite the function of the practical nurse during the physical examination.
- ✓ Identify the healthcare providers who could perform the physical examination.
- ✓ Identify the supplies and equipment that should be available in the examination room.

Basic Equipment Required for Physical Examination

The following Basic supplies required for the patient's physical examination are as follows:

- Gloves
- Hospital gown
- Sheet or disposable paper drapes
- Bath blanket (to prevent chill)
- Tray with flashlight, gloves, lubricant normal saline,
- Cotton-tipped application, tissues
- Basin for soiled instruments

Medical Equipment required for the patient Examination.

The Practical Nurse will require the following Medical Equipment Patients Physical Examination:

- ✓ Blood pressure apparatus and stethoscope
- ✓ Tongue depressors
- ✓ Ophthalmoscope (for examining eyes)
- ✓ Otoscope (for examining ears)
- ✓ Turning fork
- ✓ Percussion hammer (to check reflexes)

Practical Nurse Function Before Patient Examination

The following outlines the functions of the Practical Nurse before the patient's Physical Examination.

- Arrange equipment and supplies.
- Be sure that you have everything needed.
- Test all equipment to make certain that it works correctly.
- Before the examination, tell the patient what will take place and explain the reason for the procedure.
- The patient who knows what to expect will be more relaxed and cooperative.

Practical Nurse Function during Patient Examination;

The following outlines the Function of the Practical Nurse during the patient's Physical Examination;

- Wash your hands.
- Have the patient's chart available – the physician needs to know the information that has already been obtained via the nursing observations and lab reports.
- Measure the patient's vital signs as follows;
    - Temperature
    - Pulse
    - Respiration
    - blood pressure

Practical Nurse Function During Patient Examination

Additionally, during the patient's physical Examination, the Practical Nurse ensures comfort and care as follows:

- ✓ Provide continuing privacy, and be sure to adjust the frames each time the patient assumes a different position.
- ✓ Assist the patient in assuming the proper position for each part of the examination.
- ✓ If the patient is asked to stand erect, place paper towels on the floor or have the patient put on slippers.

Practical Nurse Function after Patient Examination

Nurse function after the patient's Physical Examination is as follows:

- Wash your hands again.
- See that the patient is returned safely to his room and is comfortable.
- Properly label and care for all specimens collected.
- Have all lab slips and x-ray slips ready with the patient's name, date, and other required information.
- Hand instruments and supplies to the physician

Positioning of Patient

Introduction

During the Physical Examination, it may be necessary to re-position the patient to carry out an examination of a specific area of the body or to examine a patient with existing injuries or medical conditions.

Patients may be asked to assume the following positions during the Physical Examination.

- The Horizontal Recumbent
- Dorsal Recumbent Position
- Fowler's Position
- Dorsal Lithotomy Position

Learning Outcomes

This lesson will provide the learner with an overview of the various ways to position a patient for the Physical Examination.

On completion of the lesson, the learner will:

- Identify the various types of positions used during the Physical Examination.
- Understand how to position a patient for a particular specific test and examination.

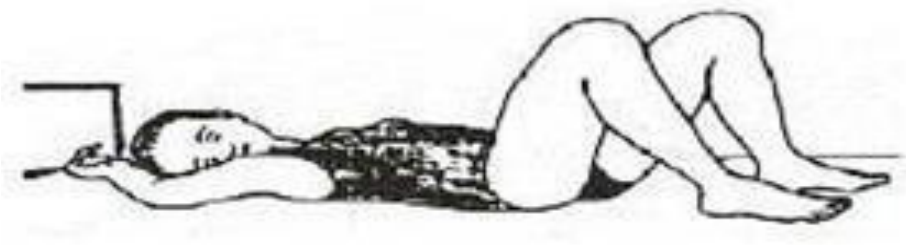
Horizontal Recumbent position

Horizontal Recumbent Position is used for most physical examinations. The patient is on his back with his legs extended.
Arms may be above the head, alongside the body, or folded on the chest.

Dorsal recumbent Position

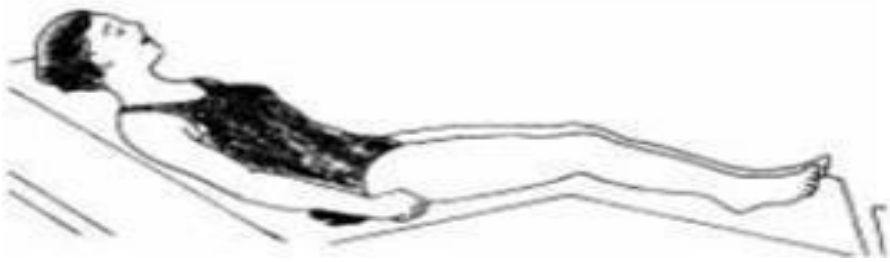
The dorsal recumbent Position is the position where the patient is on his back with knees flexed and soles of feet flat on the bed.

Fold the sheet once across the chest. Fold a second sheet crosswise over the thighs and legs so that the genital area is easily exposed



Fowler's Position

Fowler's Position is used to promote drainage or ease breathing. The headrest is adjusted to the desired height and the bed is raised slightly under the patient's knees.



Dorsal Lithotomy Position

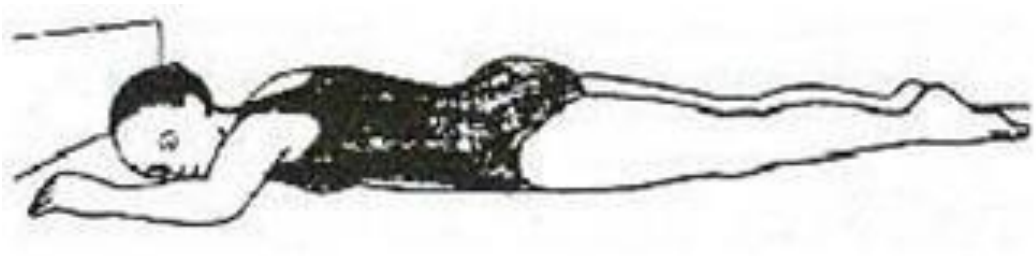
The Dorsal Lithotomy Position is used for examination of pelvic organs. Similar to the dorsal recumbent position, except that the patient's legs are well separated and thighs are acutely flexed. Feet are usually placed in stirrups.

Fold the sheet or bath blanket crosswise over the thighs and legs so that the genital area is easily exposed

Prone Position

Prone Position is assumed by the Patient to examine the spine and back. The patient lies on the abdomen with the head turned to one side for comfort. Arms may be above the head or alongside the body. Cover with a sheet or bath blanker.

NOTE: An unconscious patient, or one with an abdominal incision or breathing difficulty usually cannot lie in this position.

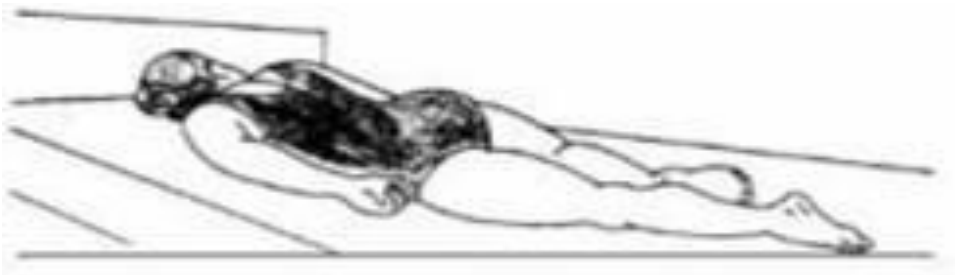


Sim's Position

Sim's Position is used to position the patient for rectal examination. The patient is on the left side with the right knee flexed against the abdomen and the left knee slightly flexed.

The left arm is behind the body; the right arm is placed comfortably.

Note: Patients with leg injuries or arthritis usually cannot assume this position.



Knee-Chest Position

Knee-Chest Position is used for rectal and vaginal examinations and as a treatment to bring the uterus into a normal position.

The patient is on the knees with the chest resting on the bed and elbows resting on the bed or arms above the head. The head is turned to one side. Thighs are straight and lower legs are flat on the bed.

Note: do not leave the patient alone; he/she may become dizzy, faint, and fall.

Body Systems Examined and Evaluated
All the flowing body systems are examined during the physical examination by a physician.

Relevant patient evaluations are carried out to establish the overall health status of the patient and to determine the next phase of their phase of their, medical treatment and care.

- ✓ Musculoskeletal System
- ✓ Integumentary System
- ✓ Cardiovascular System
- ✓ Respiratory System
- ✓ Gastrointestinal

Learning Outcomes

After completing the lesson, the learner will;

Understand the role of the Practical nurse during the Physical Examination Cite the factors to consider when working with diverse patient groups i.e. older patients and Infants. Cite the procedures and techniques to apply when examining the various body systems. Physiological Measures are routinely made during the Physical Examination.

The Role of the Practical Nurse
The practical nurse assigned to assist in the physical examination plays an important role in supporting both the patient and the physician or other healthcare providers. (As discussed earlier in the unit Role of the Practical Nurse in the Physical Examinations). Your Presence will be comforting for most patients. Some parts of the examination may be uncomfortable or painful. Evaluate the patient's condition and his need for assistance before the physical examination.

Factors to Consider

Some factors to consider for the patient's Physical Examination are the following;

Age

- Elderly patients will probably need help getting to the examination room, getting on the examination table, and assuming certain positions.
- Infants and children will not be cooperative and may need restraining.

State of health

- Some patients may be just too sick to tolerate a lengthy physical examination.

Assisting with an Infant or child

- ✓ Make every effort to get the child's cooperation during the examination.
- ✓ If the child is too young or too ill to cooperate, use restraint when necessary.
- ✓ Position the child's arms alongside the body and wrap the child in a sheet or blanket.
- ✓ Stand on the opposite side of the table from the examiner during the chest and abdominal examination.
- ✓ Hold the child's arms above his head with one of your hands and his feet at the ankles with your hand.
- ✓ The equipment used to examine an infant or child is the same as for an adult except some items are smaller.

Musculoskeletal System

During an examination of the Musculoskeletal System, the patient will be examined by the Physician for symmetry of parts, mobility, and coordination.

Integumentary System

During an examination of the Integumentary System, the physician will observe the patient's skin for intactness, color, and the presence of scars or rashes, and the skin should be felt for warmth and unusual texture.

Respiratory System

During the physical examination, the Respiratory System is evaluated for;

- Respiratory rate
- Adequacy of ventilation and gas exchange membranes
- Clear lung fields, and symmetry of the chest.
- Arterial blood may be drawn to be analyzed for blood gases.
- The physician can learn a lot about the chest and estimate the size and location of the heart and lungs by auscultation (listening) and by percussion (tapping and thumping).

Aseptic Non-Touch Technics

The Aseptic Non-Touch Technique (ANTT) was designed to help address the variable aseptic technique standards of practice and provide a rationalized, contemporary, evidence-based framework to standardize critical competency and to help improve the standards of practice. It is defined as:

"A specific and comprehensively defined type of aseptic technique with a unique theory-practice framework based on an original concept of key-part and key-site protection; achieved by integratingstandard precautions such as hand hygiene and personal protective equipment with appropriate aseptic field management, non-touch technique, and sterilized supplies."

ANTT is applied to all infusion-related procedures, including vascular and other infusion access deviceinsertion and management, and administration of infusion medications and solutions, as a critical aspect of infection prevention.

The INS guidelines emphasize the aim of any procedure is Asepsis. To achieve asepsis in practice and support education and research, ANTT uses the terms **Key-Part** and **Key-Site** Protection. A key-part is any sterile part of equipment used during an aseptic procedure, such as needle hubs, syringe tips, needles, and dressings. A key site is the area of skin penetration that provides a direct route for the transmission of pathogens into the patient and presents a significant infection risk.

Aseptic Technique

Proper Aseptic Technique is one of the most fundamental principles of infection prevention in aclinical and surgical setting. The word 'aseptic' is defined as "free from pathogenic organisms (insufficient numbers to cause infection)". According to the Journal of Infusion Nursing, Aseptic Technique is defined as "a set of infection prevention actions aimed at protecting from infection

during invasive clinical procedures and management of indwelling medical devices; notably, it is ageneric term that is variously defined, interpreted, and used interchangeably with other practice terms, such as **clean**, **sterile**, and **non-touch technique**.".

The word 'sterile' is often used interchangeably with the word 'aseptic'. Sterile is defined as the absence of all microorganisms. However, sterile is not achievable in a typical healthcare setting due tothe multitude of microorganisms in the air environment. Items are only sterile if they are free of potential infectious agents, and once a sterile object meets a non-sterile object, surface, person, dust, or airborne particles, the object is no longer sterile. The integrity of sterile packages should be preserved while being opened, dispensed, or transferred.

Aseptic technique prevents the transfer of potentially pathogenic microorganisms to a susceptible site on the body, or to sterile equipment/devices. It is a combination of decontamination processes,sterilized equipment, and handling techniques; the aseptic technique is used to minimize the potential transmission of pathogenic microorganisms. It plays an important role because it is a component ofcompounding sterile preparations and requires assured competence and specified standards.

The Aseptic Technique also encompasses practices performed immediately before and during a surgical procedure to reduce post-operative infection. These include:

- Hand washing
- Surgical scrub
- Using surgical barriers, including sterile surgical drapes and personal protective equipment, including head coverings, surgical masks and gowns, gloves, and shoe coverings
- Patient surgical prep
- Maintaining a sterile field
- Using safe operative techniques
- Maintaining a safe environment in the operating room