The General Principles of Physical Examination

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Modern Approach to Diagnosis

• History taking
• Examining the patient
  - looking (inspecting)
  - feeling (palpating)
  - tapping (percussing)
  - listening (auscultating)

Medicine is learned by the bedside and not in the classroom.
Sir William Osler (1849 – 1919)
The General Principles of Physical Examination

- Formal approach important
- Ensures thoroughness and that important signs are not overlooked
- Systematic approach
- Observant like a detective
The Physical Examination

More mistakes are made from want of a proper examination than for any other reason.

Russell John Howard (1875 – 1942)
Preparing the Patient for Examination

• Introduce yourself
• Confirm the patient’s name and DoB
• Ask how the patient wants to be addressed
• Explain the purpose of the examination and what the examination will involve
• Obtain the patient’s consent
• Offer a chaperone
Preparing the Patient for Examination

- Well lit, quiet room
- Undressed (respect privacy)
- Position patient at 45°
- Patients are always examined from the right side of the bed
First Impressions

- How sick is the patient?
- Assess the patient’s colour
- Level of comfort?
- Body habitus?
- Signs of illness?
The Physical Examination

• Hands
  – Nails (nicotine staining, pitting, haemorrhages...)
  – Clubbing
  – Hands: capillary return, colour, warmth, turgor
  – Atrophy
  – Contractures
  – Tremor
The Physical Examination

• Pulse, BP, RR
• Facies
  – Colour
  – Eyes
  – Mouth
  – ?diagnostic
• Hair
The Physical Examination

• Neck
  – Lymph nodes
  – JVP
  – Thyroid
  – Trachea
  – Carotid pulse

YouTube: Geekymedics.com:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziaYBkgEZNU
The Physical Examination

- Chest
  - Inspect wall
  - Feel expansion
  - Palpate apex
  - Percuss lungs
  - Auscultate lungs
  - Auscultate heart sounds

MacLeod’s Examinations: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSce-YxmA10
The Physical Examination

- Abdomen
  - Inspect
  - Palpate
  - Percuss
  - Auscultate
- Groins
- Legs
- Neurological examination
Patient-Centred Approach to Physical Examination

- Explain to the patient what you plan to do
- Obtain their consent
- Check that the patient is comfortable
- Thank them for their consent and participation
Finally, a few quotes

- **To study the phenomena of disease without books is to sail an uncharted sea, while to study books without patients is not to go to sea at all.**  
  Sir William Osler (1849-1919)

- **A physician is obliged to consider more than a diseased organ, more even than the whole man – he must view the man in his world.**  
  Harvey Cushing (1869-1939)