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Building Patient History Skills

The exam I have decided to use to review my patient history skills is an esophagram or otherwise known as a barium swallow test. The patient was an 84-year-old female who had been admitted into the emergency department.

To begin, it is important to understand what an esophagram test is. It is basically a fluoroscopy exam that looks at one's esophagus and throat in live action during the action of swallowing. The purpose of this type of exam is to look for any blockage or structural abnormalities that may be impacting someone from swallowing successfully. To be successful in this type of exam, it is important to get as much information as possible from the patient that can be beneficial to the radiologists.

In this specific exam on this patient, I made sure to begin taking notes before we began anything. After having brought the patient into the exam room, I took out a clipboard I could take notes on that I could pass on to the radiologists. The first question I began with, was what signs or symptoms was she experiencing. She replied by telling me that she had not been able to swallow anything solid now for about four days. I asked her if she felt pain of any type in her throat and she said no. I asked her what she had been consuming for the last couple of days, and she told me and all fluid diet. She said soups and broths were her primary source of nutrition, because it was the easiest to swallow. I followed up by asking what time her last meal was at and what it was, she answered 8pm the night before and it was only hydration drinks. After noting that information, I asked if she was currently taking any medication. She said no, because she was not able to swallow pills of any kind. Finally, I asked if there was anything else that she noticed that wasn't normal during the last couple of days. She said that during the last 4 days, she

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had an increase in mucus production in the back of her throat, that would require her to cough and try clear it. After having written down all her answers we finally began the exam on her.

I feel there were maybe two other questions I could have asked her that could have been beneficial to the radiologist. The first would have been, if she had ever had a history of swallowing problems in the past. The second would have been, if she was allergic to anything. Both these questions would have helped find a possible cause for her swallowing issue.

Finding as much history about the patient isn't only important to the tech performing the exam but very crucial to the radiologists reading the images. With adequate patient history, a radiologist might find it much easier to diagnose the patient much quicker. This can be through process of elimination using the patients answers and history.

For the most part, I feel I asked appropriate questions related to the exam being given. I do feel that the notes I wrote for the radiologist were informative and could have provided much help and clarification they might have had. I now understand how my role can be important in helping get the radiologist the appropriate information needed to provide the proper care for our patients.