Building Patient History Skills

The exam I chose to evaluate is a chest X-ray, which is performed to visualize the lungs, apices, costophrenic angles, and diaphragm within the chest cavity. For this particular case, the technologist and I needed to adjust the original exam order after obtaining additional information from the patient during my assessment.

The initial order from the physician was for an AP portable chest X-ray. After calling the patient from the lobby, I assisted him into a wheelchair for transport to the radiology department. During transport, I verified his identity and asked what brought him to the hospital. He stated that he had been experiencing chest pain for the past two days that had not improved. When I asked if he had experienced this pain before, he said no. I then asked if he had felt any dizziness, lightheadedness, shortness of breath, or weakness since the pain began. He explained that the pain was dull, intermittent, and that he was still able to stand and walk on his own.

Gathering a thorough patient history is important not only for my own understanding but also to provide the radiologist with relevant clinical information the patient may share. I chose to ask these specific questions to better understand his symptoms and determine whether he was ambulatory, which would allow for a standard chest series. This information is essential because if a patient can stand, obtaining PA and lateral chest X-rays provides the radiologist with optimal images for accurate interpretation and diagnosis.

Once we arrived in the X-ray room, the patient stood up easily and was able to follow my instructions for both the PA and lateral projections. Before returning him to the lobby, I informed the technologist that the original order was for a portable AP chest X-ray. However, based on the patient’s assessment and ability to stand, we were able to perform the standard projections instead.

We updated the order in the system to reflect the standard chest series rather than the single AP view. The technologist also documented in the notes that the change was made based on the patient’s assessment responses. This ensures that the radiologist is aware of the reasoning behind the adjustment and that optimal diagnostic images were obtained.

After hearing from other technologists, I learned that there are several additional questions that are beneficial to ask for this type of exam. These include asking if the patient has a history of asthma, recent respiratory infections, or positive COVID-19 tests. It's also important to ask about any history of heart disease or other cardiac conditions, as these can directly relate to chest pain symptoms.

Overall, I would rate my patient history ~~-taking~~ skills as an 8 out of 10. I recognize that there are more specific and targeted questions I could have asked, and I plan to continue improving in this area. As I gain more experience and exposure to a variety of clinical situations, I believe my patient assessment skills will continue to develop.