

Preface

When I looked at the charts for my first three patients this morning, everyone looked the same—several weeks of neck pain and x-rays diagnosing degenerative disease. I've got to be able to quickly sort through each patient. All I can tell from their charts is that each one's a pain in the neck.

In medical school, we learned to obtain a chief complaint and an undirected history, allowing the patient to provide information about his or her condition without using excessive focused questions. Although this approach prevents the examiner from concentrating on an incorrect diagnosis before enough facts have been identified, it is time-consuming and fails to direct the patient to important historical information. In addition, an unfocused evaluation often identifies non-specific or unrelated abnormalities.

In a busy clinic, accurate diagnoses are generally reached by using the chief complaint to select an appropriate targeted history and physical examination. This targeted approach helps gather information to distinguish among common conditions that result in the chief complaint. The same general elements are used in the target examination for all chronic pain complaints, although the details vary based on pain location. Targeting the evaluation avoids excessive cost and wasted time associated with testing not directed toward specific diagnoses.

Headache and Chronic Pain Syndromes: The Case-Based Guide to Targeted Assessment and Treatment is designed to provide targeted assessments and treatment plans for common, chronically painful conditions. These assessments will be applied to typical case scenarios for each area of chronic pain. Using this approach should facilitate expeditious evaluation of pain complaints and the delivery of effective pain treatment.

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