

PACES Station 4: COMMUNICATION SKILLS & ETHICS

Your role:	You are the doctor in the clinic
Problem:	Discussing the prognosis and management of multiple sclerosis
Patient:	Miss Mary White, a 27-year-old woman

Please read the scenario printed below. When the bell sounds, enter the room. You have 14 minutes for your consultation with the patient/relative, 1 minute to collect your thoughts and 5 minutes for discussion. You may make notes if you wish.

Where relevant, assume you have the patient's consent to discuss their condition with the relative/surrogate.

Scenario:

The patient has just been found to have multiple sclerosis and has been asked to return for review this morning.

She has had symptoms for the past year and after several months her family doctor finally referred her for a specialist neurology opinion. Following an MR scan and lumbar puncture she has been told of the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, and asked to come back to receive further information and to have any questions answered.

She is engaged and planning to get married in a few months. She works as a physiotherapist and has seen patients with the same illness. She is quite anxious and upset at the prospect of her quality of life rapidly deteriorating.

Your task is to discuss the prognosis and management options with the patient, and to answer any questions she may have.

DO NOT EXAMINE THE PATIENT

DO NOT TAKE A HISTORY

Any notes you make must be handed to the examiners at the end of the station.

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Your role: You are the patient, Miss Mary White, a 27-year-old woman
Problem: Discussing the prognosis and management of multiple sclerosis

Scenario:

You work as a physiotherapist; you are engaged and are planning to get married in a few months. A year ago, your left eye became painful and you were told by the ophthalmologist that the nerve behind the eye was inflamed. This resolved after a few weeks. You have noticed that you become easily fatigued at work and your body has felt stiff on many occasions. Your legs also feel rigid at times. You have had frequent episodes of numbness in your hands and feet. You have also noticed that you have to hurry to the toilet whenever you feel the desire to urinate.

After 6 months, your family doctor referred you to a neurologist who arranged an MR scan and took a sample of spinal fluid. The results confirmed the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS). In your work, you have seen patients with this illness, some of them in the rehabilitation ward. You have seen how some of them have become extremely incapacitated by the disease.

Attitude and emotional responses

When you found out that you had MS you were shocked. You are extremely upset and anxious. You are worried that you will end up like some of the patients you see in your job. You feel you may not be able to proceed with your planned marriage, or that if you do get married and have children, they will inherit the disease.

Make sure you ask the following question:

- What treatment is available?
- Will I become wheelchair bound one day and need help with bladder and bowel control?

Other questions you might like to ask include:

- Could I have been diagnosed and treated at an earlier stage with a better long-term outcome?
- What other symptoms can I expect to experience in the future?
- Should my family doctor have referred me sooner?
- If I have children, how likely are they to inherit the condition?
- Can anything be done to stop me getting worse?

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DATE	CYCLE

Examiners should advise candidates when there are 2 minutes remaining (i.e. after 12 minutes). If the candidate appears to have finished early remind them how long is left at the station and enquire if there is anything else they would like to ask, or whether they have finished. If they have finished, please remain silent and allow the candidate that time for reflection. The surrogate should remain until the end of the 14-minute period.

A good candidate would be expected to have agreed a summary plan of action with the subject before closure. Nonetheless, in discussion, the examiners will usually ask the candidate (after one minute's reflection) to summarise the problems raised in the foregoing exchange.

The candidate should be asked to identify the ethical and/or legal issues raised in this case and how they would address them. The framework for discussion should include consideration of these four underlying principles:

- Respect for the patient's autonomy
- Duty to do good
- Duty to do no harm
- Legal aspects (a detailed knowledge of medical law is not required)

Candidates are not expected to have a detailed knowledge of medical jurisprudence. For overseas candidates in the UK, detailed knowledge of UK law is not required, although candidates should be aware of general legal and ethical principles that may affect the case in question.

The candidate should recognise his/her limit in dealing with a problem and know when, and from where, to seek further advice and support.

Examiners should refer to the marking guidelines in the four skill domains on the marksheet.

Examiners are reminded that, during the calibration process, the surrogate should be rehearsed and specific aspects of the scenario that require clarification or emphasis should be discussed. The boxes on the next page indicate areas of potential interest in this case which both examiners should consider, along with any other areas they feel appropriate. Examiners must agree the issues that a candidate should address to achieve a Satisfactory award for each skill and record these on the calibration sheet provided. Examiners should also agree the criteria for an Unsatisfactory award at each skill.

Problem:	Discussing the prognosis and management of multiple sclerosis
Candidate's role:	The doctor in the clinic
Surrogate's role:	The patient, Miss Mary White, a 27-year-old woman

Examiners are reminded the areas below indicate areas of potential interest, but are not intended as absolute determiners of Satisfactory performance. It is for the examiners to agree and record the specific criteria they will assess the candidate on during the calibration process.

During the interview please use the following question to explore aspects of communication and ethical interest:

- What factors did you take into consideration when answering the question about prognosis?

Clinical Communication Skills (Clinical Skill C)

- Explains that diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS) is usually only possible after second episode of neurological presentation
- Explains the plan of management of her acute relapses and emphasises the importance of reporting whenever she has a relapse

Managing Patients' Concerns (Clinical Skill F)

- Accepts the fact that there may have been some delay in diagnosis but that management may well have been similar
- Acknowledges the patient's fears given her experience with other patients with this disease
- Suggests other avenues of support such as the MS specialist nurse and MS society

Clinical Judgement (Clinical Skill E) (also points of ethical interest)

- Explains the value of specialist input and follow-up
- Makes contact with MS nurse if patient agreeable

Maintaining Patient Welfare (Clinical Skill G)

See marksheet