

EXPERIENCING THE CLINIC SETTING WITHOUT PATIENTS: A CD-ROM BASED TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Summary: We have created software that simulates a patient encounter. This tool assesses the student's ability to evaluate a patient and formulate a diagnosis. This software is unique in presenting authentic patient images, and is designed to teach medical students and post-graduates physical diagnosis and the thought processes that support best medical practice.

Abstract: Clinical training currently suffers from too few quality patient encounters. Quality encounters include space for independent thought, mentoring from experienced physicians, and time to sharpen observation skills. This deficiency is reflected in poor physical diagnosis skills and inability to problem-solve in the clinical setting. Thus, this tool will be used to augment this aspect of clinical training.

The student begins by being introduced to a patient with a problem. The history is taken using a dialog box, and the exam is performed using a flash movie process. Special exams (i.e. fundoscopy) are accessed through linked files. The student enters initial impressions on the differential diagnosis screen, followed by laboratory and radiography sections, where the student orders from a menu. After viewing results (including actual radiographs), final diagnosis is entered.

The case progresses as would a patient encounter, including limitations on "going back" to certain elements. At pivotal points questions are posed to assess knowledge and to orient the student's thoughts, simulating a mentor's input. After completion, all elements of the exercise are scored and several options are offered including "expert feedback" on best practice, review of the diagnostic tests ordered, and subject review of the causative disease.