About the Exam Itself

- Test questions or “items” are written by certified nurses in the specialty of medical-surgical nursing.
- Successful or unsuccessful
- If unsuccessful, you will receive diagnostic feedback on each of the major content areas covered on exam

The diagnostic feedback categories are:
- Low: The score you obtained for this content area is below an acceptable level. Substantial study of this content area is recommended prior to retaking the examination.
- Medium: The score you obtained for this content area is marginally acceptable; however, further study of this content area is recommended.
- High: The score you obtained for this content area is well above average; however, a review of this content area may be helpful to you prior to retaking the examination.

- Multiple-choice format
- Drop and drag
- Multiple responses
- Hot spot

Day of the Exam

What to Bring
- When you arrive at the test center, you must present one form of acceptable identification from the list below:
  - Driver’s license issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles in one of the 50 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, or one of the U.S. territories
  - State identification issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles in one of the 50 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, or one of the U.S. territories
  - Passport
  - U.S. military identification

RIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM

- Get a good night’s sleep. Having a clear head is valuable.
- Eat something sensible. Don’t go hungry or get too crazy on caffeine.
- Gather your supplies. Pen, paper, calculator (if allowed).
- Manage your anxiety. Some anxiety is natural and helpful. It sharpens your senses and gets the adrenaline going. Yet do try to stay calm. Remember, the exam is only one part of the learning process.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

- Read the directions thoroughly
- Relax
- Budget your time
- When you get stuck, identify the problem and move on
- Concentrate—Don’t daydream. Do the test at your own pace
- Don’t worry about who gets done first
- Ask yourself for clarification

MULTIPLE CHOICE STRATEGIES

- Read and consider ALL the options before you identify the best one.
- Read the test items carefully. Cover up the alternatives and just read the stem. See whether you can answer the question in your head before you look at the alternatives.
- Eliminate the obviously incorrect answers first. This will save time and reduce anxiety.
- Change your answers cautiously. Make sure you have a good reason. If you aren’t certain, it’s best not to change. Your first impulse may be best.
- Guess!!! This multiple-choice tests give credit for correct answers without penalty for wrong answers. Answer EVERY question.
- Be cautious when the answer includes every, always, and never. There are few situations in which something is always or never true.
Understand the Question

- Question = stem
- Direct and to the point
- Do not read any other information into it
- Answer choices = Recognize distracters
  - Knowledge
  - Expertise
  - Judgment

**PRINCIPLE 1:** Do NOT read extra meaning into the question; assume it is direct and to the point.

Read the STEM correctly

- Is it asking for the right or wrong choice?
- Rephrase the question so that it is clear in your mind.
- Think of the correct answer before you look at the distracters.

**PRINCIPLE 2:** Understand exactly what the stem is asking before considering the distracters

**PRINCIPLE 3:** Rephrase the question in your own words so that it is clear in your own mind

No really... Read the STEM correctly

- All good distracters should apply directly to the stem. There should be a commonality.
- All distracters may be correct, but not the right choice for the specific question being asked.
- Is each distracter true or false in relation to the stem?

**PRINCIPLE 4:** When analyzing the distracters, isolate what is important in the answer alternatives from what is not important, relative to the question.

Check and Double Check the Stem

- **PRINCIPLE 5:** After choosing the correct answer alternative and separating it from the distracters, go back to the stem and make sure your choice does, in fact, answer the question.
- **PRINCIPLE 6:** Look for similarities in two of the choices remembering that the purpose of distracters is to divert you from the one right answer.

Multiple Variables

- Each possible answer to the question includes several variables.
- Use the Process of Elimination.
- What variable fits the stem and what variable does not fit the stem?
- You will eliminate 50% right out of the gate.

**PRINCIPLE 7:** When a question contains multiple variables as alternative choices, use the elimination-of-variable technique.

Sample Test Question

Peter Houser, a 68-year-old man with a history of hypertension, has an aortic aneurysm repaired. On the first postoperative day, he is transferred from the intensive care unit (ICU) to the medical-surgical unit. Mr. Houser has a midline incision, a nasogastric tube connected to low intermittent suction, and a left subclavian triple lumen catheter. On receiving Mr. Houser from the ICU, the nurse notes that he has edema of both lower extremities, and his pedal pulses are not palpable in either foot. Which of these actions, if any, should the nurse take?

1) Wrap his lower extremities with warm blankets and reassess pulses.
2) Use a hand-held Doppler ultrasound device to reassess his pulses.
3) Elevate his extremities and reassess pulses.
4) No action is indicated.

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Answer

2) Use a hand-held Doppler ultrasound device to reassess his pulses.

Cardiovascular/Administering-Monitoring Therapeutic Interventions

During the aortic aneurysm repair, the aorta is clamped to prevent bleeding while the graft is being placed. At the time of placement, distal peripheral tissues are not perfused. Postoperative nursing care includes assessment of the pedal pulses every hour for 24 hours. Changes in pulse quality or absent pulses must be reported. Pulses are assessed with a Doppler, if needed, to provide a more objective means of assessment.

Sample Test Question

The following day, Mr. Houser complains of left-sided neck pain. The nurse observes swelling of his left arm. The physician is notified and an internal jugular and subclavian vein thrombosis is diagnosed. The central line is removed, and a heparin infusion is initiated using a peripheral line. Mr. Houser’s orders include warfarin sodium (Coumadin) 5 mg PO daily. At what time will Mr. Houser’s heparin be discontinued?

1) When his INR is within the therapeutic range.
2) When his platelets are greater than 150,000 mm$^3$.
3) When his PTT level is subtherapeutic.
4) When his hematocrit is 35%.

Answer

1) When his INR is within the therapeutic range.

Cardiovascular/Administering-Monitoring Therapeutic Interventions

A patient with venous thromboembolism is initially treated with both heparin and warfarin (Coumadin). When the international normalized ratio (INR) reaches the desired therapeutic range, the heparin is discontinued.

Sample Test Question

Lauren Johnson, 36 years old, is admitted for evaluation of hip pain that is increasing in intensity and limiting her ability to walk. Ms. Johnson is a nurse employed at the hospital where she is now a patient. She has a history of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and long-term steroid use. She is diagnosed with osteoporosis related to steroid therapy. She is to take calcium carbonate (Os-Cal).

Given Ms. Johnson’s history and symptoms, the nurse should consider which of these additional problems associated with steroid use?

1) Myositis ossificans
2) Osteomalacia
3) Hyperglycemia
4) Hypothyroidism

Answer

3) Hyperglycemia

Musculoskeletal and Neurological/Administering-Monitoring Therapeutic Interventions

Corticosteroids can alter glucose tolerance; therefore, blood glucose should be monitored. Adverse reactions to corticosteroids include hyperglycemia, as well as diabetes mellitus and carbohydrate intolerance.

Sample Test Question

Ms. Johnson’s current orders include alendronate sodium (Fosamax) 70 mg PO weekly. Which of these instructions should the nurse give Ms. Johnson about taking Fosamax?

1) ”Take the Fosamax at bedtime.”
2) ”Take the Fosamax and Os-Cal at the same time.”
3) ”Rest on your right side for fifteen minutes after taking Fosamax.”
4) ”Remain upright for at least 30 minutes after taking Fosamax.”
Answer

4) "Remain upright for at least 30 minutes after taking Fosamax."
Musculoskeletal and Neurological/Teaching-Coaching Function

Patients who are taking Fosamax should be instructed to remain upright for 30 minutes after taking the drug to reduce the potential for esophageal irritation.

Sample Test Question

A nurse co-worker of Ms. Johnson calls the unit and asks the nurse, "How is Lauren? I heard she wasn't doing very well." Which of these statements by the nurse would be appropriate?

1) "She's doing a little better now, but I can't tell you anything else."
2) "Her sister is here; let me have you speak to her."
3) "I'll let you talk to Maria Saunders, the nurse taking care of Lauren today."
4) "Lauren has requested that we share information only with her husband."

Answer

4) "Lauren has requested that we share information only with her husband."
Musculoskeletal and Neurological/Helping Role

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) mandates the confidential protection of a patient's personal health information. Healthcare information cannot be shared without the patient's specific consent unless the information is necessary to provide care.

Sample Test Question

After radiographic studies, Amy Lopez is admitted with a diagnosis of bowel obstruction. She is receiving intravenous fluids. A positive answer to which of these questions would indicate the obstruction is in the small intestine?

1) Has she had pencil-shaped stools?
2) Has she been vomiting blood?
3) Does she have reflux vomiting?
4) Does she have a metallic taste in her mouth?

Answer

3) Does she have reflux vomiting?
Gastrointestinal/ Diagnostic and Patient Monitoring Function

Patients with obstruction in the small intestine develop abdominal distention which can cause reflux vomiting.

Sample Test Question

A nasogastric (NG) tube is inserted, and Mrs. Lopez's NG tube output is 3,000 ml during the first 12 hours. It is decided to treat Mrs. Lopez's obstruction medically. Because of the NG output, the nurse would expect the physician to order

1) an increase in intravenous fluid rate.
2) an order to clamp the NG tube for next 4 hours.
3) repeat abdominal x-rays.
4) a Fleets enema.
Intravenous fluids are given to replace the patient's loss of fluid and electrolytes through an NG tube. Nursing management includes measuring the NG tube output and determining the need for additional fluids. In this case, because of the patient's large output, fluids would need to be increased to prevent dehydration.

Sample Test Question

Mrs. Lopez's condition improves. Which of these findings is the best indicator that Mrs. Lopez's condition is resolving?

1) Decreased nausea.
2) Passing of flatus.
3) Electrolytes within normal limits.
4) NG output less than 1,000 ml in the last 24 hours.

Sample Test Question

A patient with an elevated blood pressure and a fasting blood glucose of 120 mg/dl is suspected of having metabolic syndrome. An additional finding suggestive of metabolic syndrome would be

1) central obesity.
2) chronic ankle edema.
3) triglycerides 120 mg/dl.
4) high density lipoproteins 80 mg/dl.

Sample Test Question

A medical-surgical nurse working on the Policy and Procedure Committee is asked to rank the quality of evidence used to support a policy on pin care of adult orthopedic patients. Which of the following represents the best source of evidence?

1) A single case-control study.
2) A single descriptive or qualitative study.
3) Opinions of authorities or expert committees.
4) Systematic review of randomized controlled trials.
4) Systematic review of randomized controlled trials.

Musculoskeletal and Neurological/Organizational & Work Role Competencies

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is the highest level of experimental research, in which researchers test an intervention against the usual standard of care by randomly assigning subjects to either a control or treatment group. Systematic reviews (or meta-analyses) by a group of experts of multiple RCTs concerning the same topic provide the highest level of evidence.

Sample Test Question

A patient is suspected of having sepsis. The patient's orders include blood cultures, glucose monitoring, a fluid bolus, and a broad spectrum antibiotic. According to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) guidelines, in which sequence should these orders be carried out?

1) Antibiotics, glucose monitoring, fluid bolus, blood culture.
2) Fluid bolus, antibiotics, blood culture, glucose monitoring.
3) Blood cultures, antibiotics, fluid bolus, glucose monitoring.
4) Glucose monitoring, antibiotics, blood cultures, fluid bolus.

Answer

3) Blood cultures, antibiotics, fluid bolus, glucose monitoring.

Hematological/Immunological/Integumentary/Effective Management of Rapidly Changing Situations

The Surviving Sepsis Campaign and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement have identified interventions ("bundles") to reduce mortality due to sepsis and septic shock. Sepsis resuscitation includes measuring serum lactate levels, obtaining blood cultures prior to antibiotic administration, administering broad spectrum antibiotics, infusing a fluid bolus, and maintaining adequate central venous pressure and central venous oxygen saturation. Additionally, sepsis management includes monitoring and maintaining glucose greater than the lower limit of normal but less than 180.

You’ll Do Well!

Happy Test Taking! 😊