

# DYNAMIC LEARNING EXERCISE

## INSTRUCTOR KEY

### Decision Making Pathways

Individual or small group activity. May also be facilitated with the whole class. Time – 30 minutes (15 minutes to complete/15 minutes follow-up and discussion). May be used in EMT, AEMT, or paramedic classes.

We want our students to think, apply, and make good decisions. To do this, students need solid assessment skills, experience in situations where they must think and apply, and to see a positive result from their efforts. They need to have an “A Ha!” moment where it all comes together. That is what this dynamic exercise is designed to do.

Students are required to identify differences and similarities in patient presentations to help create differential diagnoses. While differential diagnosis requires practitioners to cast a wide net, most of the time there are a small number of very likely causes or the differentials are already narrowed down to those likely causes. This exercise will help students make a solid final diagnosis which results in appropriate protocol selection and treatment decisions.

You will provide the patient information and complaint to the student. Give two possible causes of that complaint. We have provided some examples and exercises for you with the package. Have the student complete the form. Ask students for detailed assessment—not generalities.

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The form will ask students for findings they would suspect in each condition. Be sure this is in detail and with considerations for findings which may be present in both conditions. This helps develop differential diagnostic thinking and prevents biases in reasoning like anchoring on one specific finding. Some of the most important points come at the end of the form in the confounding factors and make-or-break points for the diagnosis.

**Facilitation is always important to guide the process—especially the first time you use it.**

This is a great exercise to use in your lesson plan at the end of a topic (e.g. respiratory), to keep in your back pocket for a time you finish early and need an activity, or even when you feel the class just needs something other than lecture. We've created pathways for you to use that cover common situations. Feel free to create your own.

#### This exercise provides three things:

- A sample decision-making pathway
- A blank decision-making pathway for student use
- Pre-filled pathways (patient, complaint, and conditions) for use in class

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**The Best Education Tools for EMS**  
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**DECISION MAKING PATHWAY**

**PATIENT COMPLAINT**

Respiratory Distress

**PATIENT INFORMATION**

3 Years Old

**CONDITION 1**

Asthma

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

Wheezing  
(Lower Airway)

Asthma History  
+ Meds

Prolonged Expiratory  
Cycle

**COMMON FINDINGS**

Respiratory Distress

Tachycardia

Airway Noises

Sudden Onset

Age Group

**CONDITION 2**

Foreign Body  
Airway Obstruction

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

Stridor  
(Upper Airway)

Environment  
(Small Objects present)

Drooling

Trouble Swallowing

**CONFOUNDING FACTORS**

Can be similar presentation  
Both possible in this age group  
High Stress Situation

**MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS**

Lung Sounds  
History  
Environment

**DECISION MAKING PATHWAY**

PATIENT COMPLAINT

PATIENT INFORMATION

CONDITION 1

CONDITION 2

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

COMMON FINDINGS

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

**CONFOUNDING FACTORS**

**MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS**

## DECISION MAKING PATHWAY

PATIENT COMPLAINT

Chest Pain

PATIENT INFORMATION

49 year old male patient with  
a history of hypertension

### CONDITION 1

Acute Coronary  
Syndrome



SPECIFIC FINDINGS



COMMON FINDINGS



### CONDITION 2

Dissecting Thoracic  
Aneurysm



SPECIFIC FINDINGS



CONFOUNDING FACTORS

MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS

## DECISION MAKING PATHWAY

**PATIENT COMPLAINT**  
Difficulty Breathing

**PATIENT INFORMATION**  
24 year old female developed  
breathing difficulty during exercise

**CONDITION 1**  
Spontaneous  
Pneumothorax

**CONDITION 2**  
Asthma Attack

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**COMMON FINDINGS**

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**CONFOUNDING FACTORS**

**MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS**

**DECISION MAKING PATHWAY**

**PATIENT COMPLAINT**  
Difficulty Breathing

**PATIENT INFORMATION**  
An 18 year old was  
working in the yard

**CONDITION 1**

Asthma

**CONDITION 2**

Anaphylaxis

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**COMMON FINDINGS**

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**CONFOUNDING FACTORS**

**MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS**

## DECISION MAKING PATHWAY

**PATIENT COMPLAINT**

Anxiety Attack

**PATIENT INFORMATION**

Roommate reports the patient is having an "anxiety attack"

**CONDITION 1**

Hyperventilation

**CONDITION 2**

Kussmaul's Breathing

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**COMMON FINDINGS**

**SPECIFIC FINDINGS**

**CONFOUNDING FACTORS**

**MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS**



## DECISION MAKING PATHWAY

### PATIENT COMPLAINT

Motor Vehicle Collision

### PATIENT INFORMATION

Male patient has been removed from the vehicle by bystanders. He appears unresponsive and tachypneic.

### CONDITION 1

Cardiac Tamponade



SPECIFIC FINDINGS



COMMON FINDINGS



### CONDITION 2

Tension Pneumothorax



SPECIFIC FINDINGS



CONFOUNDING FACTORS

MAKE - OR - BREAK POINTS