

# How to write a case that stimulates discussion

Laurie Fishman, M.D.

Boston Children's Hospital Academy

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I have no disclosures

# Objectives

1. Contrast appropriate case-based learning objectives for novice and advanced learners
2. Analyze the anticipated flow of a case
3. Create realistic scenarios that engage the learner



What prompted this workshop?

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## Disasters

Stuck on early part of case

Stuck on the answer

Just stuck – silence!

# Planning



# Introductions



How to begin?

Have pen and paper ready

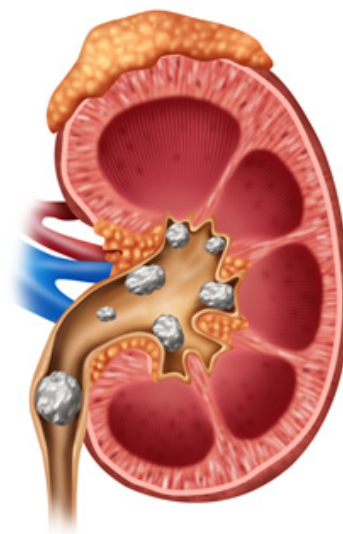
Start thinking of your own  
session



# The basics: Who? What? When?



WHAT  
CAUSES  
KIDNEY  
STONES?





# FIRST

- Pick the focus  
(learning objective)

# SMART

Specific  
Measurable  
Attainable  
Relevant  
Timebound

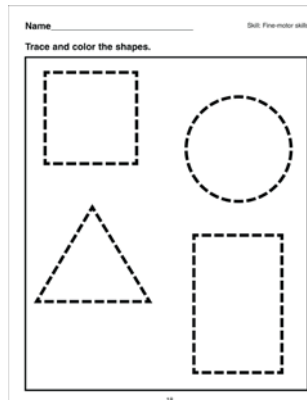
Ronald Harden 1999, 2007  
Brodsky 2011



# Identify the learner's level of knowledge

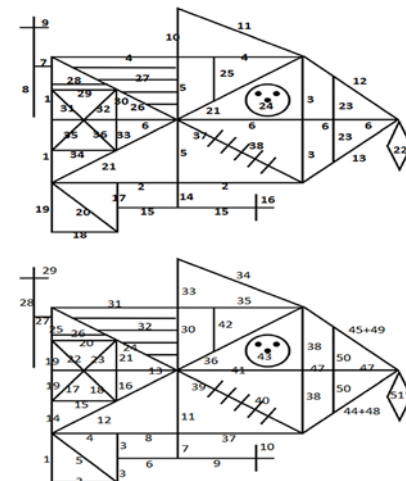
## Early learners

- Stereotypic so can learn the basic pattern recognition



## Advanced learners

- Complex case with unrelated details or confounding data



How much time do you have?

**1 learning point  
for every 15-20 min**



# You have the basics

- Goals
- Learners
- Setting and time



*Take a moment to jot down ideas*



# Grab their attention

- Realistic
- Relevant
- Narrative



# Use active and colorful language to create realistic cases

The patient complains of dysphagia

*Ms. Hathaway found her hand-picked blueberries now seemed to stay lodged in her throat for hours*

An elderly man has less stamina

*Mr. Smith won the senior division of the town marathon last month, but is frustrated that he now cannot walk 2 blocks to the post office.*

Knowles, 1984, Kesinger 2003.

# Name your patient thoughtfully

- Tamika Jackson
- Colleen O'Rourke
- Sheldon Hollingsworth
- Peter Lee



Do your case names reflect the composition of learners?

*Could the names affect the diagnoses considered?*

***\*\*\*Do NOT use a real patient lightly disguised!\*\*\****



How do I...

**FOCUS ON THE TREATMENT OPTIONS?**





# Mention the alternative treatment directly

- The Wallace family has heard about a medicine advertised on the radio and wants to know if that is a better option
- His cousin Ed had the same condition and was treated differently
- Shayna wants the pill form that is once weekly

# Create barriers to elicit multiple diagnostic or treatment options

- Allergy to a medicine
- Patient wants only dietary changes, not medicine
- Insurance refuses to cover that medication
- Anxiety about side effects
- Cannot swallow a pill or give self-injection



How do I...

**FOCUS ON DIAGNOSIS?**



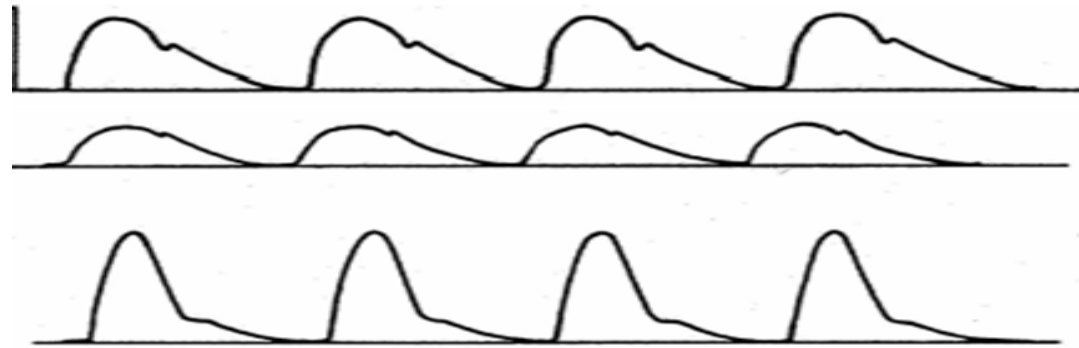
# Describe symptoms the way patients present them

- *Objects slip out of Anna's right hand and she keeps tripping*
- *Mr. Jones sees double as he looks around his small room*
- Ricky is so thirsty



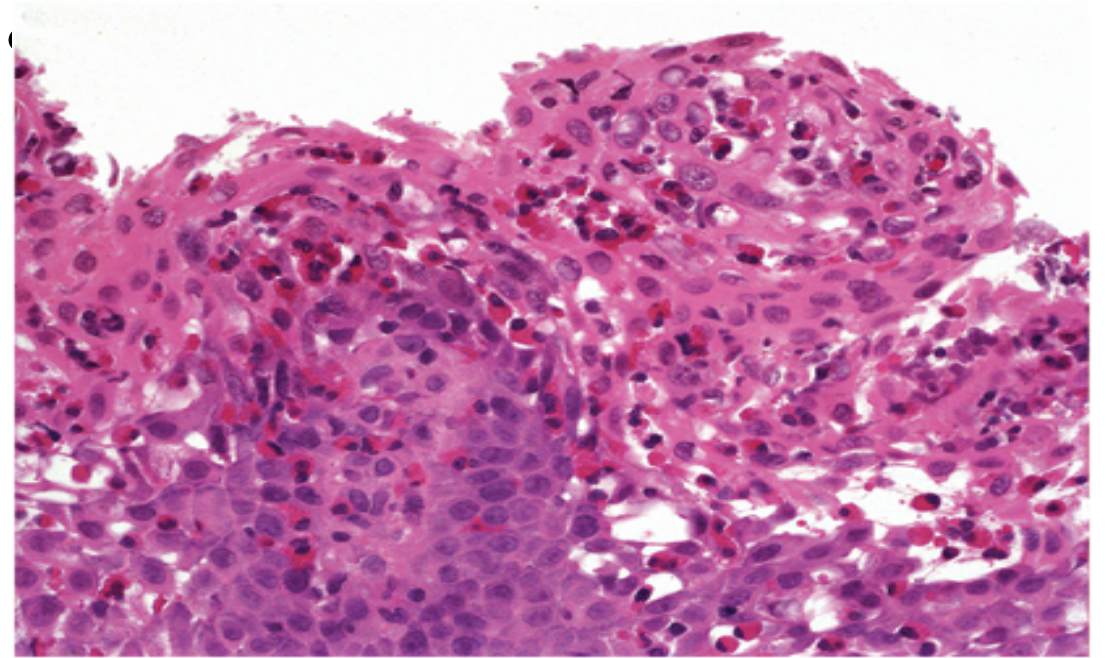
# Present data without interpretation

- Pulse 46
- Blood pressure 160/110



- Are these values normal? What about in the context of this patient?
- An athlete or artist? A patient relaxed or in pain crisis?

Have the report go missing



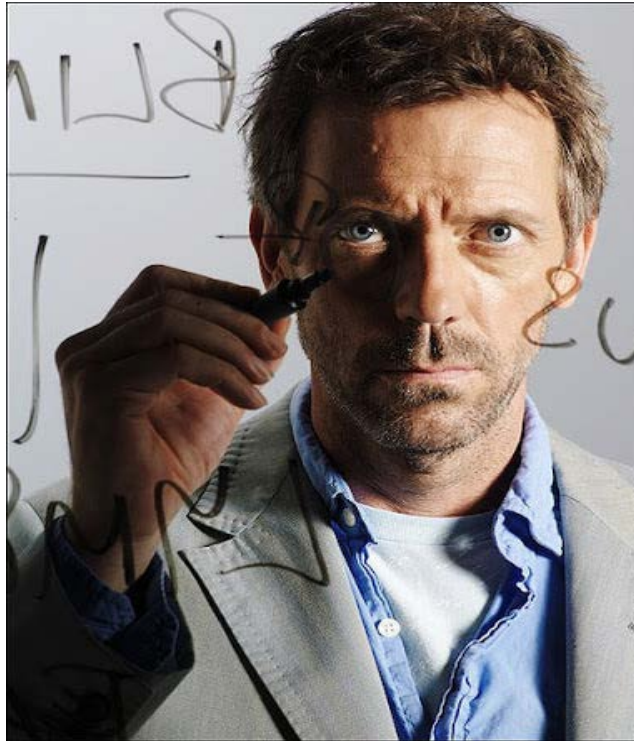
# Assess the patient for a second opinion

- The previous diagnosis could be right OR wrong
- Realistic way to assess every aspect of the case



How do I...

**FOCUS ON THE DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS?**





# Don't be a slave to chronology

- 15 year old Kayla is brought from soccer practice with pain and vomiting. Her x-ray shows bowel obstruction.
- This leads to a very full discussion of the differential.
- Later, her father arrives (or her old records are found) and it is revealed that she has inflammatory bowel disease and had surgery.

How do I...

**FOCUS ON THE NATURAL HISTORY?**



# Lose your patient to follow up

- Mr. Rivera has not been to your office for 4 years. When he returns, in a great deal of pain. He has not been on medication for his arthritis.
- Real world
- Skips ahead to later stage of the condition
- Allows comparison of treated vs untreated natural history
- Reasons for non-adherence (cost, insurance, availability, denial, fear)

# Checklist for breakout groups

- Identify the learner level (ie novice/student, advanced learner, peer)
- Identify the time frame (ie 30, 45, 90 min)
- Identify 1 specific learning idea for each 15 min (antibiotic resistance for UTI treatment, controversy over steroids in asthma)
- Name and describe the patient
- Write first 3 sentences of the case

# Breakout Groups!



# How did your breakout session go?



# Use missing information and mistakes to provoke discussion



- Dr. Chan's report comes but no slides or films
- Ms. Harrigan forgot to stop her aspirin before surgery
- Joanna takes the methotrexate, but did not think the folate mattered so stopped taking it

# Teach someone else

- Jamie the 3<sup>d</sup> year medical student forgot to obtain any family history
- Dr. Ching is new to the hospital and asks about timeframe for ordering imaging studies
- Joy has finished her internship and now will assess her first floridly psychotic patient alone. She asks you for advice.





# Summary

- FIRST identify specific objective(s) of the talk
- Clarify time allotted and level of the learners
- Craft the case to direct the discussion to the desired topics
- Make it realistic and vivid and active

# Thank you!

## Twelve Tips on Writing a Discussion Case that Engages Learners

Cohen, D, Newman L, Fishman LN  
Medical Teacher 2017

