

General Guidelines for Interviewing Patients

1. Use an opening greeting (i.e., Good afternoon, How are you today?)
2. Introduce yourself. (Use your name, state your relationship to Dr. _____ and your role in the office)
3. Use open-ended questions to initiate the interview such as:
“What brings you here today?” or “What can I do for you today?”
4. Allow the patient enough time to tell his/her story.
5. Ask questions to clarify the information given. These are the typical components of the history of present illness.

For example:

When did it start?
How did it start?
Has it become better or worse?
How severe is it?
Does anything help you feel better?
Does anything make you feel worse?
Do you have any other symptoms?

6. Ask other questions that you think may help narrow down the differential diagnosis
7. Ask more specific questions that you think are important. Consider asking about potential risk factors for diseases that could be causing the patient’s symptoms.
8. Use some of the skills of communicating with patients to elicit the patient’s concerns and demonstrate empathy.
9. Conclude the interview (e.g. “I think I understand your concerns. I am going to talk to Dr. _____ and we will both be back in to see you shortly. I’m sure she/he will have more questions for you.”)