

# **Understanding Differential Diagnosis and Initial Management**

## **Introduction**

- Differential diagnosis is crucial for patient management from initial presentation to emergency situations.
- It involves a comprehensive understanding of possible conditions and symptoms.
- This process ensures accurate diagnosis and effective treatment.
- Insights into clinical presentations and appropriate diagnostic steps are vital.

## **Definitions**

**Differential Diagnosis:** A list of possible diagnoses covering the clinical situation, usually written in descending order of likelihood.

**Impression:** A simplified diagnosis often used when a full differential diagnosis is too restrictive.

## **Importance and Definition**

- Term 'Differential Diagnosis' used less now, may be misunderstood.
- Formulates a list covering possible diagnoses.
- Important for managing patient from initial presentation, especially in emergencies.
- Doctors must examine thoroughly, write a management plan, and consider all possible causes.
- Intermediate step in preparing differential diagnosis, potentially replaced by 'Impression'.

### **Box 3.1: Sample Emergency Medical Problems**

- Chest pain: Rule out cardiac causes - Potential diagnoses: Acute coronary syndrome, Pulmonary embolus, Gastro-oesophageal reflux, Musculoskeletal pain, Dissecting thoracic aneurysm.
- Severe headache: Likely migraine - Potential diagnoses: Tension headache, Subarachnoid hemorrhage, Space-occupying lesion, Temporal arteritis, Sagittal sinus thrombosis.
- Apparent stroke: Cerebral infarction - Potential diagnoses: Subdural hemorrhage, Intracerebral hemorrhage, Tumors or abscesses in the cerebellum, Carotid or vertebral artery dissection, Hemiplegic migraine, Brain tumor with hemorrhage, Cerebellar abscess, Cerebral vasculitis.

## **Acute Headache Diagnosis**

- Most common cause: Tension headache.
- Diagnosis primarily based on patient history.
- Important to rule out serious conditions like subarachnoid hemorrhage or sagittal sinus thrombosis.

**The End.**