

ORDERING DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

The appropriate assessment of a patient's condition can often best be accomplished with diagnostic tests.

Laboratory tests and diagnostic imaging may also be indicated to monitor a patient's condition. In order to reduce or to better manage the risk of misdiagnosis or delay in diagnosis and treatment, Nurse Practitioners may wish to take into account the following considerations when ordering diagnostic tests:

Indication and selection of tests

Are the proposed tests evidence based and indicated to provide information further to an inconclusive physical examination and history, or to confirm a provisional diagnosis?

Does the patient require additional tests to monitor the progress of treatment (e.g. INR readings) or to identify any signs of toxicity as a result of an ongoing treatment?

Does the patient require any tests outside your legislated scope of practice or scope of employment? If so, have you made a referral to the appropriate healthcare professional?

Did the patient examination and history indicate any potential for unusual but severe conditions that could cause significant harm to the patient if left untreated? If so, has a plan been established to avoid harm (e.g. close follow-up, discharge instructions to the patient) or diagnostic tests arranged to rule out this potentially serious condition?

Does the patient have any allergies or sensitivities that would make the proposed tests contraindicated?

Are the proposed tests the least intrusive to reasonably provide the required information?

Consent for tests

Have you discussed the proposed tests with the patient, including the reason these tests are recommended, as well as the expected outcome, benefits, significant risks and alternatives?

Has the patient been informed of potential implications of not undergoing the recommended tests?

Have you obtained the patient's informed consent for the proposed tests and documented the informed consent discussion in the patient's chart?

Arrangements for tests

Has the patient been provided with any special instructions to undergo the tests?

Is there a clear understanding between you and the patient as to who will make the appointment for the tests?

If the patient is to make the arrangements for the tests, has he/she been provided with the requisition(s), and the appropriate contact information and any instructions regarding the time frame within which the tests should be conducted?

If you or a member of the staff is to make the arrangement for the tests, have the appropriate measures been taken to ensure that they will be done in a timely manner?

Has this information been documented in the patient's chart?

Timing considerations

Are there any urgent considerations that would warrant steps to expedite the tests?

Is there a risk that the patient's condition might deteriorate before undergoing the tests? If so, have measures been contemplated to address this contingency? For instance, have arrangements been made for further follow-up? Alternatively, has the patient been advised of the risks of deterioration, how this deterioration can be recognized and what to do if it happens?

Have any timing considerations and measures to address the same been documented in the patient's chart?

Follow-up on tests

Is there a system in place for ensuring test results are received in a timely manner?

If test results are not received in a timely manner, is there a process in place to ensure appropriate follow-up?

Are the test results clear? If not, have you taken appropriate steps to clarify the results?

Have the test results, whether remarkable or unremarkable, been communicated to the patient?

Has any necessary follow-up action been arranged and communicated to the patient?

Have the test results, your review of the test results, and any recommended follow-up action been documented in the patient's chart?

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Questions?

Should you wish to learn more about the CNPS and the resources available to you, please do not hesitate to email us at info@cnps.ca or call 1-800-267-3390

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