

Overview of Clinical Medicine

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Key concepts, typical workflow, and essential specialties

1. Definition & Scope

Aspect	Description
Clinical Medicine	The branch of medicine focused on the direct care of patients—diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and management of disease.
Primary Goal	Restore health, alleviate suffering, and improve quality of life through evidence-based interventions.
Setting	Hospitals, outpatient clinics, primary-care offices, urgent-care centers, long-term care facilities, and community health programs.
Interdisciplinary Nature	Integrates basic sciences (anatomy, physiology, pathology), diagnostic technologies, pharmacology, surgery, and public health.

2. Core Process of Patient Care

(The “clinical reasoning cycle”)

1. Data Collection

- *History taking*: chief complaint, HPI, past medical/surgical history, family/social history, review of systems.
- *Physical examination*: systematic inspection, palpation, percussion, auscultation.
- *Diagnostic testing*: labs, imaging, ECG, functional studies.

2. Problem List Generation

- Prioritize acute vs. chronic issues.
- Distinguish primary diagnosis from comorbidities.

3. Differential Diagnosis

- Use pattern recognition, disease prevalence, and pathophysiology.

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- Apply mnemonic frameworks (e.g., VINDICATE, OPQRST) when appropriate.

4. Diagnostic Workup

- Order targeted investigations to confirm or exclude possibilities.
- Consider cost-effectiveness and patient safety (radiation, contrast, invasive procedures).

5. Management Plan

- **Therapeutic:** pharmacologic (dose, route, duration), procedural, surgical, lifestyle.
- **Preventive:** vaccinations, screening, risk factor modification.
- **Rehabilitation:** physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychosocial support.

6. Implementation & Follow-up

- Communicate plan clearly to patient and care team.
- Schedule monitoring (labs, imaging, visits).
- Adjust therapy based on response and side effects.

7. Documentation

- SOAP note format (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan) or equivalent EMR template.
- Ensure legal completeness, billing accuracy, and continuity of care.

3. Major Clinical Specialties (Snapshot)

Specialty	Typical Focus	Common Settings	Representative Conditions
Internal Medicine	Adult medical problems, multisystem disease	Inpatient wards, ambulatory clinics	Diabetes, heart failure, COPD
Family Medicine	Comprehensive care for all ages	Community clinics, primary care offices	Preventive care, minor injuries
Pediatrics	Health of infants, children, adolescents	Children's hospitals, pediatric offices	Asthma, congenital anomalies
Surgery	Operative management of disease	Operating rooms, surgical wards	Appendicitis, cancer resections

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Specialty	Typical Focus	Common Settings	Representative Conditions
Emergency Medicine	Acute, undifferentiated illness/injury	Emergency departments, trauma centers	MI, stroke, trauma
Obstetrics & Gynecology	Reproductive health, pregnancy	Labor & delivery suites, OB?GYN clinics	Prenatal care, cervical cancer
Psychiatry	Mental health disorders	Psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics	Depression, schizophrenia
Neurology	Disorders of the nervous system	Neurology clinics, stroke units	Epilepsy, multiple sclerosis
Dermatology	Skin, hair		