UNFOLDING
HEALTH ASSESSMENT
CASE STUDIES
FOR THE STUDENT NURSE

KIRSTI MAYNARD | ANDREA ADIMANDO
Critical thinking can be the difference between keeping patients safe and putting them in harm’s way. But as a student nurse, you may find that mastering these skills is challenging, and you may lack confidence in assessing your patient’s health.

Case studies are beneficial, but some are more effective than others. Traditionally, they present information upfront, and your patient’s status is predetermined. But that isn’t realistic as your patient’s health can take an unexpected turn. Unfolding case studies provide new information while you read, teaching you to think critically and apply what you learned in nursing school to real-life situations you’ll face on the job.

Authors Kristi Maynard and Andrea Adimando created Unfolding Health Assessment Case Studies for the Student Nurse as a practical, straightforward study tool for your health assessment class and the NCLEX. Whether you’re a pre-licensure student who needs to review what you learned earlier or a practicing nurse who can apply these concepts to more complex scenarios, this book will:

- Enhance your knowledge and skills in basic health assessment
- Increase your comfort level in analyzing patient scenarios
- Provide opportunities to practice and apply what you learned in health assessment courses
- Develop your confidence in answering NCLEX questions

“Who wouldn’t love a book that identifies, and then reveals, assessment as a superpower?”

— Deborah W. Smith, DNP, ARNP, FNP-BC, Nurse Practitioner Director
Gonzaga University

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She began her career in nursing more than 12 years ago as a medical intensive care nurse. After graduating with her MSN, she entered full-time practice as an FNP in the primary care environment. She remains active in clinical practice in her community in both the primary care and urgent care environments. Currently, her full-time role is Assistant Professor of Nursing at Quinnipiac University, teaching full time in both the graduate and undergraduate nursing programs with a course load focused on health assessment, health assessment lab, pathophysiology, and pharmacology.

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Adimando has over 15 years of pediatric and psychiatric nursing experience and continues to practice as a PMHNP in various levels of care across Connecticut. Within her previous positions in emergency psychiatry, inpatient and outpatient psychiatry, her private practice, and pediatric medical-surgical settings, she focused on the integration and interdependence of physical and mental health. The health assessment skills she acquired through this expansive background allow her to apply real-life clinical scenarios and relevant expertise to her teaching of health assessment to BSN and MSN students.

In addition to her clinical practice, Adimando has published several peer-reviewed articles and presented at local and national conferences on her research interests. These include complementary and alternative therapies, multimodal educational strategies for nursing students, and compassion fatigue in nurses. She has also previously served as the Vice Chairperson on the ANCC’s content expert panel for the PMHNP board certification exam, as well as a member of the panel for eight years. Recently, she received the ANCC’s prestigious Certified Nurse Award for her contributions as a PMHNP in Connecticut.
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Introduction

As nurse educators, we appreciate the effort it takes to keep students engaged in active learning. We hope this text will become an indispensable tool for your health assessment course planning. In this resource guide, we provide you with a snapshot of the contents of each chapter, along with recommendations for when each chapter might be most useful in your curriculum. To further enhance student learning and aid in the development of an immersive lesson plan, we have provided discussion prompts and activities for each chapter to enrich the classroom experience. Thank you for choosing this case book for your students.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Unfolding Case Study

This chapter reviews the value of integrating unfolding case studies as a routine method for studying nursing content. Students often discredit or question the value of an activity if they cannot recognize the potential value. This chapter explains why unfolding case studies are a preferred study method to master complex concepts and foster skills of critical appraisal and dynamic response. If students can understand the “why” and recognize the learning objectives, they are more likely to fully engage in the learning activity.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter should be assigned prior to the assignment of the case studies in this text. This chapter is intended to be foundational and highlight the value and usefulness of the text.

Class Discussion Prompts:

What is the value of active learning versus passive learning when considering a study plan?

Why is self-reflection so valuable? What are some methods of self-reflection you use to enhance your learning?

Class Activity:

Pair with another student. Locate one evidence-based article (peer-reviewed journal) that explores the value of self-reflection in nursing. Summarize the article and present a brief summary to the class.
This chapter reviews the steps of the nursing process. It offers guidance on rationale application of the steps of the nursing process and describes how useful the nursing process is in both completing the case studies in this text and evaluating NCLEX-style questions. In addition, this chapter reviews NANDA criteria for the formulation of a nursing diagnosis.

When to introduce this chapter: Just as with Chapter 1, this chapter is intended to offer foundational information that will guide the students’ thought processes as they work through the case studies. It should be introduced prior to beginning the cases.

Class Discussion Prompts:
Do you view the nursing process as linear or cyclic? Why?

In your current experience as a student nurse, name a scenario or situation you have observed and describe how the nursing process was applied to improve the patient outcome.

Class Activity:
Provide the students with a brief patient scenario. Ask them to write a NANDA-style nursing diagnosis based on the information provided.
CHAPTER 3

Analyzing and Answering NCLEX-Style Questions

This chapter reviews the current standards of the NCLEX exam. The current NCLEX test plan and content distribution are discussed and presented with visual aids for quick reference. The chapter provides an in-depth approach to the interpretation of the various styles of NCLEX questions and discusses tips for rationale answer selection, including nursing concepts such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the prioritization of the ABCs (airway, breathing, circulation).

When to introduce this chapter: Ideally this chapter is assigned prior to beginning the case studies. It may also be useful as a test prep guide/reference for students struggling to answer NCLEX-style questions.

Class Discussion Prompts:
After reviewing the different types of NCLEX questions, what do you think is the most challenging and why? How might you adapt your study habits to better prepare for this style of question?

Class Activity:
Select or write five sample NCLEX-style questions. Ask students to work in pairs to review the questions and highlight pertinent information in the body of the question. Have students summarize the question in their own words, using “What is the question asking of me?” as a prompt. Students will then select the answer and provide a brief rationale to explain why each answer is correct or incorrect.
CHAPTER 4

Assessment Considerations for the Geriatric Patient

This chapter focuses on special considerations for geriatric assessment and highlights common variations in presentation that develop as a normal part of the aging process. The case involves a 72-year-old male who has received limited healthcare. He is currently residing with his son, who has concerns for his father’s safety and mental status. The case reviews common screening techniques for fall risk, hypertension, and general wellness. It includes pertinent points for patient education and directed nursing care, including the process of medication reconciliation.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter would be appropriate for assessment techniques for the elderly patient, including normal variations of aging, screening for and management of fall risk, and the concepts of polypharmacy and the nurse’s role in pharmacological risk reduction.

Class Discussion Prompts:

What is a normal variant of aging that may impair a patient’s capability for self-care?

What is polypharmacy? Why are elderly patients more at risk for polypharmacy?

What nursing actions can help prevent polypharmacy and its potential associated negative outcomes?

Class Activity:

Have the students walk through their homes to identify potential fall risks. Students will then draft a remediation plan to improve the safety profile of their home.
CHAPTER 5
Assessment Considerations
for the Pediatric Patient

This chapter reviews the case of “Susie,” a healthy 6-year-old female who presents for a school physical. The case reviews a pediatric physical exam: vaccination scheduling (including HPV vaccination), height and weight measurement, growth percentile chart graphing, and family education on wellness in the pediatric patient.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter is appropriately paired with lectures on pediatric development and milestones. It offers robust explanation of vaccination scheduling, thus serving as a valuable resource when reviewing vaccination administration recommendations.

Class Discussion Prompts:

What are some techniques you might employ to actively engage the pediatric patient during the subjective section of their exam? How might your technique change based on the age of the child?

Pediatric obesity is a global health problem that greatly impacts the United States. What patient education is valuable for pediatric patients and their caregivers when addressing a child with an abnormally high BMI? Since this can be a sensitive subject, what therapeutic communication techniques might be helpful to share information without seeming judgmental?

Class Activity:

Break students into small groups and assign each a body system. Particular to that assigned system, instruct the students to list five ways their examination techniques would differ between the pediatric patient and the adult patient. This may be physical differences or differences in technique. For example: For an adult patient you would pull the ear lobe up and back, and for a child, you would pull the ear lobe down and out to facilitate otoscopic examination.
This chapter follows the case of an elderly male patient who sustains a cerebral vascular accident. Information includes abnormal vital signs that may be evident in a patient with a neurological event, identification of predisposing factors for stroke, basics of neurological assessment and recognition of symptoms that may be associated with impaired neurological status, and the assessment and safety of patients with seizure activity.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter is appropriate when introducing content on neurological assessment. It may also be useful when addressing considerations for patients with seizure disorders or discussing the management of a patient with cardiovascular disease.

Class Discussion Prompts:
In the instance that you are tasked with assessing a nonverbal patient, what are some assessment techniques that you might use to determine factors such as cognition or pain level?

Class Activity:
Cranial Nerve Jigsaw!

Break students into 12 groups. Open a shared document (such as Google Docs) and invite all students to participate. Assign each of the 12 groups a cranial nerve. In the document, each group will add information on the function of their assigned cranial nerve, as well as assessment methods particular to that nerve. Once each group has contributed, students will have a collaborative document that details the function and assessment of each cranial nerve to use as a study reference. Afterward, ask each group to present their findings.
CHAPTER 7

Cardiovascular and Vascular Anomalies

Chapter 7 reviews the case of a 60-year-old male who sustains a myocardial infarction (MI). It reviews pertinent cardiac risk factors and findings associated with MI. The chapter provides a detailed description of the cardiac exam, including assessment of the precordium, cardiac auscultatory techniques, assessment of murmurs, and basic ECG findings. The case goes on to describe the procedure of cardiac catheterization and postsurgical monitoring that progresses to congestive heart failure.

**When to introduce this chapter:** This chapter will be helpful when introducing concepts of cardiac assessment and ECG interpretation.

**Class Discussion Prompts:**

- MI is more likely to occur undetected in female patients. Why is this? What are some of the major differences between how male and female patients might experience symptoms of MI?

- Formulate three subjective questions that would provide more information regarding a patient’s risk for developing coronary artery disease.

**Class Activity:**

Although venous and arterial disease are classified as peripheral vascular disorders, their implications and presenting symptoms are vastly different. Present students with a list of objective and subjective findings of peripheral vascular disease. Ask them to determine which findings are associated with venous peripheral vascular disease and which are associated with arterial peripheral vascular disease.
Chapter 8 reviews the case of a 62-year-old woman with a history of smoking who is diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The properties of the respiratory assessment are reviewed during this case, including techniques of auscultation and percussion and indications for imaging.

**When to introduce this chapter:** The chapter will be useful when introducing concepts of a basic respiratory assessment and findings associated with chronic respiratory conditions such as COPD and emphysema.

**Class Discussion Prompts:**

- Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are both classified as COPDs even though the pathology of each is very different. What are the differences between the pathophysiology of the two conditions, and how do those differences manifest during the physical assessment?

**Class Activity:**

- Smoking cessation is most successful with strong patient support from medical providers. Provide the students with a vignette of a patient who currently smokes and ask students to develop a resource plan for the hypothetical patient.
This chapter follows the case of a patient diagnosed with cirrhosis. Content includes basic liver functionality along with subjective and objective findings commonly found in the patient with liver disease.

**When to introduce this chapter:** This chapter is useful when introduced with elements of gastroenterological assessment. It can also be useful in highlighting risks associated with alcoholism or the identification of chronic liver disease.

**Class Discussion Prompts:**

*Jaundice* is the yellow discoloration of the skin that is commonly associated with liver disease. Why does this yellow discoloration occur? What are other symptoms of chronic liver disease?

**Class Activity:**

*Pick an Organ, Any Organ!*

Write out the name of each major abdominal organ and toss them in a hat. Break the class into groups and have each group pull the name of an organ. They are responsible for describing the function of that organ, providing a description of the pain pattern, and describing any specific assessment techniques (e.g., appendix and rebound tenderness). When it is their turn to present, the students should identify the location of the organ along with their assessment findings.
CHAPTER 10

Genitourinary and Sexual Health

This chapter reviews the case of a 17-year-old female who presents with abdominal pain. The case goes on to review basic female reproductive anatomy, presentation of a patient with a urinary tract infection, screening for sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy. A unique quality of this case is its explanation of how to approach conversations with adolescent patients accompanied by parents or caregivers.

When to introduce this chapter: This dynamic case is appropriately introduced with topics such as adolescent health, assessment of urinary tract infection, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or abdominal pain.

Class Discussion Prompts:

How would you approach a situation where an adolescent patient is accompanied by a parent or adult? What are the legal implications? How does the presence of a caregiver potentially influence your examination (positively and negatively)?

Class Activity:

The patient in this case is discovered to be pregnant. Have students work together to identify three key teaching points for the expectant mother (e.g., avoiding soft cheeses and raw fish).
CHAPTER 11

Dermatological Anomalies

This case begins with a female patient presenting for a routine physical examination. The interviewing nurse identifies a number of risk factors for skin cancer during the subjective portion of the exam, which ultimately leads to the identification of a suspicious lesion during the objective examination. The chapter goes into detail regarding the risk factors for developing cancer, descriptions of common skin lesions, and expected “normal” variants of aging.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter is a natural supplement to content related to dermatological assessment. It also has a place in the discussion of normal variants of aging, with its robust description of common variants in the appearance and function of the skin in the older adult.

Class Discussion Prompts:

What education can the nurse provide to the patient regarding sun safety? What are some common misconceptions about skin cancer, and how can the nurse influence a positive change in self-care practices?

Class Activity:

Skin Lesion Bingo!

Using an automatic Bingo card generator (there are many available for free online), develop Bingo cards using the names of primary and secondary skin lesions (e.g., papule, macule, etc.). Each student receives a Bingo card, and the instructor acts as the caller. Instead of calling the names of the terms when drawn, the instructor will only provide students with an unlabeled picture or description of the lesion. Students will have to rely on their integumentary vocabulary to match the photos or descriptions to the vocabulary on their Bingo cards. When students get five in a row, they can call out “Bingo!” and read back the matching terms.
CHAPTER 12

Head and Neck Anomalies

This chapter involves a 32-year-old female who presents to an outpatient clinic with complaints consistent with an acute sinus infection. The nurse proceeds to perform an examination of the ears, nose, and throat. Details of the examination technique, along with pertinent terminology, are introduced throughout the case. During her exam, the nurse discovers an enlarged thyroid gland, and the case further develops to address a new diagnosis of hypothyroidism.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter can be introduced with content regarding examination techniques of the head and neck including the ears, nose, and throat. It is equally relevant when reviewing the assessment of thyroid disorders.

Class Discussion Prompts:

What is the difference between hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism? What are the differences in the subjective and objective presentation of each condition?

Class Activity:

Describe It!

Select images of a normal tympanic membrane, a sclerosed membrane, and a case of otitis media. Display one image at a time for the students to evaluate and describe—encourage them to identify landmarks. Encourage the use of correct terminology when describing what they see (e.g., instead of saying “red” they should say “erythematous”). They can compete either as a class or in small groups. This activity can also be repeated with images of the eye or throat.
CHAPTER 13

Assessment of the Transgender Patient

This chapter follows the case of Max, a transgender male who is establishing care with a new primary care provider. Max reveals during his interview that he is the victim of intimate partner violence (IPV). The chapter reviews appropriate LGBTQ terminology including gender identities and pronouns. There is a review of the types of IPV and an IPV risk assessment. The chapter also explores hormone therapies and associated risks, as well as anticipated assessment findings.

When to introduce this chapter: This chapter will supplement content on LGBTQ populations, social inclusion, and social justice. Additionally, its focus on IPV makes it applicable to curriculum on domestic violence and abuse.

Class Discussion Prompts:

Nurses are mandatory reporters of confirmed or suspected abuse in at-risk populations. What does this mean? How would you approach a situation where you suspected abuse?

Class Activity:

This activity focuses more on class discussion to increase social awareness and acceptance. Guide students in a conversation on using inclusive language. Give examples of what is and what is not considered to be inclusive language. Ask for student input on what constitutes an “inclusive environment” and how the nurse can influence social inclusion for a diverse patient population.
APPENDIX A

Practice Test

The practice test offers 50 NCLEX-style questions (question formats include multiple-choice and select-all). The questions are focused on health assessment and general wellness and incorporate content from each case study in the text.