



Presenting on Surgical Rounds: A Student Primer

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One of the challenging tasks that budding physician assistant (PA) students face during the clinical phase of training and surgical rotations is that of oral presentation. During the didactic phase of PA education, many schools begin to introduce the concept of oral presentation, but do not necessarily teach how to tailor it to a surgical patient. Many students must learn through trial and error what to and what not to include, only to discover that the next surgical team they work with wants it slightly different! With that said, there is a basic framework that can be used and key pieces of information that must be included in each presentation.

Whether or not you have received formal education on presenting through PA school, oral presentation is certainly a skill that builds with time. The following is a brief overview of presenting the adult surgical patient that hopefully you will find useful while getting started on your first surgical rotation. The following tips can be applied mostly to patients admitted to post-surgical floors, but can also be adjusted for patients in surgical intensive care units with the addition of information such as ventilator settings as necessary.

Tip #1: Time

To begin with, allow plenty of time to pre-round on your patients. If your surgical team rounds early in the morning, you may need to plan accordingly so that you can read your patients' charts thoroughly, check on lab results, and do physical assessments of your patients.

Tip #2: Templates

I highly recommend using a template to make sure you hit all of the highlights in your presentation. If you are nervous, it helps to guide your presentation when you start to get off track or distracted by details. It is also impossible to memorize all of the information, so it is something to take notes on for each patient!

Tip #3: Trends

With all data and lab values, be sure to look for trends and patterns. While it's tempting to simply write down current values, take a moment to search the medical record for values from previous few days. Remember that patients are dynamic! Be an astute student that notices changes to a patient's temperature and can report the trend from the previous day. You will be applauded for paying attention to these details!

Formatting Your Template

An example of how you might format your template and order your presentation is as follows:

Important data: key items to ask your patient or to obtain from the medical chart

- Vital signs: blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature, pulse oximetry, weight
- Labs: try to determine the most pertinent values for your patient and how they are trending
- Intake and output: be sure to include oral intake, IV fluids, as well as urinary catheters and any drains that are present!
- Medications and IV fluids: know what is prescribed and why. Any allergies should be mentioned here as well.



- Diet: total parenteral nutrition would be mentioned here

Questions to ask and report on your patient: Pain level, fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, bowel movements, presence of flatus (everyone typically gets excited about this!), use of incentive spirometry, ambulation, physical therapy, occupational therapy

Physical exam findings: include the most pertinent aspects of your exam. For surgical patients, remember to include incisions, dressings, and drains.

Patient concerns: this is a good opportunity to present patient concerns to the surgical team and be a patient advocate.

Plan: this may include changes to pain management, antibiotics, ambulation, imaging, etc. The focus is on how to prepare and move the patient towards recovery and discharge. As a student, you may not get this far in your presentation but should still be prepared to offer suggestions as to the management of the patient.

Now you are ready to begin your presentation, "In room 6, we have Mrs. Jones, a 70-year-old woman, a patient of Dr. Smith, who is now post-operative day 3 after a hepatic resection . . ." The goal of the presentation should be to provide a concise picture of your patient to your surgical team, drawing attention to key aspects that need to be addressed in their care. With these simple tips and template, hopefully you are now able to organize your thoughts so that you feel confident and ready to present!