

Practical tips for carrying out clinical observations

Based on [Section 4 - The Point of Care - Hospital Pathways programme: observations guide](#)

Here are some things that you might like to consider when you are planning your observations.

- Think about observing in your own clothes (as long as there are no infection control issues).
- Decide on a form of words to introduce the observation to both patients and staff.
- Before the observation starts, make sure that staff know who you are, why you're there and that, while observing, you will not usually be able to interact with them.
- Don't observe where your presence might embarrass a patient.
- Position yourself in such a way that you can see what's happening, avoid eye contact with anyone and stand or sit as still as possible.
- Make sure you have enough observation sheets with you to complete the observation.
- Make a note of the time you start observing and the time you finish (use an accurate watch – digital or with a second hand).
- Aim to observe as unobtrusively as you can – you don't want to influence what is going on around you.
- If two observers are present at the same time, don't talk to each other or distract each other.
- If you're walking through the pathway be as quiet as possible, eg, wear soft-soled shoes, close doors quietly.
- If, at any time, the observation causes difficulties for a patient, withdraw.
- Do not intervene in the environment unless someone's safety is directly threatened.
- Try and suspend all judgements. Just watch and listen and think about what you've seen after the observation is over.
- At the end of the observation, put away any paperwork to signal that the observation is over.
- Where necessary, tell people the observation is over and thank them.
- Go over your handwritten notes at the end and check that they are legible and can be read and understood by other people.

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