Physical Assessment

In conjunction with serum lab values, a physical assessment of the patient as well as information regarding his or her past medical history and psychosocial well-being can better assist the physician in making the correct diagnosis and allow the nurse to provide excellent patient-centered care.

First and foremost, the nurse should obtain the patient’s health history. Questions specific to hypoparathyroidism are listed below:

* Health History
  + Has the patient ever had a form of neck surgery?
  + Does the patient report having any of the following GI symptoms:
    - Abdominal pain
    - Nausea and vomiting
    - Diarrhea
    - A lack or loss of appetite
  + Does the patient state any of the following symptoms of hypocalcemia (symptoms of hypoparathyroidism are primarily those of hypocalcemia [Huether, McCance, Brashers, & Rote, 2008, p. 460])?
    - Paresthesia (numbness and tingling in the extremities)
    - Increased anxiety
    - Headaches
    - Irritability
    - Depression
  + Does the patient report troubles swallowing or throat tightness?
  + Does the patient report difficulty balancing and/or a history of falls or injuries?

(Sommers, 2011, p. 537).

After collecting the patient’s history, a physical assessment should be performed. Signs to look for specific to hypoparathyroidism are:

* Dry skin
* Thin hair with patchy areas of hair loss
* Ridged fingernails
* Teeth in poor condition
* Hoarse voice
* Unexplained wheezing
* Involuntary tremors and/or muscle spasms
* Positive Trousseau’s sign (carpal spasm occurs when a blood pressure cuff is inflated above the patient’s systolic pressure for three minutes)
* Positive Chvostek’s sign (the patient’s facial muscles twitch when the facial nerve [located anterior to the ear] is tapped).

(Sommers, 2011, p. 538)

Finally, a psychosocial assessment should be performed. Look specifically for these signs and symptoms:

* Altered behavior (deviation from normal behavior)
* Irritability
* Depression
* Anxiety
* Inability to cope with symptoms of disease
* Inability to cope with stressors in daily life

(Sommers, 2011, p. 538)