

Synopsis – Approach to a Chest Pain Patient

Overview and Triage

The lecture emphasizes that chest pain must always be taken seriously as it may reflect life-threatening illnesses, requiring "urgent" triage. While Ischemic Heart Disease is a common cause, it is not the only one. Immediate management involves evaluating ABCs (Airway, Breathing, Circulation), administering oxygen, securing venous access, and placing the patient on continuous ECG monitoring with defibrillator access available.

Clinical Assessment

A structured assessment is vital for diagnosis. Clinicians should characterize the pain by determining its site, onset, character, radiation, duration, exacerbating factors, and severity. Important symptoms to note include breathlessness, nausea/vomiting, sweating, cough, haemoptysis, palpitations, and dizziness or syncope. The history should include past medical history, drug history, allergies, and review of old ECGs. Physical examination includes checking vital signs, listening to lungs for issues like pneumothorax or left ventricular failure (LVF), and looking for signs of distress, murmurs, or crackles.

Differential Diagnosis

The lecture categorizes potential causes into three main areas. Cardiac causes include myocardial infarction (STEMI, NSTEMI), unstable angina, pericarditis, and aortic dissection. Pulmonary causes include pulmonary embolism, pneumothorax, pneumonia, and pleuritis. Gastrointestinal and other causes include GERD, oesophageal rupture, peptic ulcer, musculoskeletal pain, and Herpes zoster.

Key Investigations and Red Flags

Essential tests include an ECG (even if initial findings are normal), Chest X-ray, and cardiac markers such as troponin and D-dimer. Critical warning signs include sudden severe pain, radiation to the jaw or left arm, syncope, hypotension/bradycardia, and abnormal ECG results.

Conclusion

The primary goal is to rule out life-threatening causes through quick action and appropriate triage. A structured history and examination are key to saving lives.