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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIGN AND SYMPTOM

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This article discusses the important medical concepts of signs and symptoms, their differences, and their role in diagnosis. Symptoms are described as subjective experiences felt by the patient, while signs are objective findings that can be observed or measured by a healthcare professional. The article also explains their significance in identifying diseases and making accurate diagnoses, supported by relevant examples.

Introduction

In medical terminology, the concepts of “sign” and “symptom” play a fundamental role in the identification and description of diseases. These terms are widely used not only in clinical practice but also in scientific literature, and their origins can be traced back to ancient languages.

The term “symptom” originates from the Ancient Greek word “symptoma”, meaning “something that happens together” or “an occurrence.” It refers to conditions experienced and reported by the patient. For example, headache, nausea, and general weakness are considered symptoms. They are subjective in nature and can only be described by the patient. The term “sign,” on the other hand, is derived from the Latin word “signum”, meaning “mark” or “indicator.” Signs are the observable or measurable manifestations of a disease that can be

identified by a healthcare professional. For instance, increased body temperature, elevated blood pressure, skin rashes, or swelling are considered objective signs.

Historically, the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates introduced an approach to medicine based on careful observation of patients and emphasized the importance of evaluating both signs and symptoms in diagnosing diseases. This approach later became one of the fundamental principles of clinical medicine.

Main Part

Signs and symptoms are fundamental diagnostic elements in clinical medicine, playing a central role in disease identification and differential diagnosis. In modern clinical practice, these two concepts are considered complementary but conceptually different categories. Medical literature states that symptoms are based on the patient's subjective experiences, while signs are objective findings identified through clinical examination (Clinical diagnosis principles).

Symptoms usually appear in the early stages of a disease and often prompt patients to seek medical attention. They include clinical complaints such as pain, weakness, dizziness, and shortness of breath. A key characteristic of symptoms is that they depend on the individual perception and psychological state of the patient; therefore, the same disease may present differently in different individuals. For this reason, relying solely on symptoms may lead to diagnostic errors.

Signs, on the other hand, are objective manifestations of disease that are identified through physical examination, laboratory tests, and instrumental diagnostic methods. For example, in arterial hypertension, elevated blood pressure is an important clinical sign; in pneumonia, crackles heard during lung auscultation are significant findings; and in anemia, reduced hemoglobin levels are key indicators. Since signs are confirmed by healthcare professionals, they increase the reliability of diagnosis.

In clinical practice, correctly understanding the difference between signs and symptoms significantly improves diagnostic accuracy. The process of Differential diagnosis involves analyzing both components together. For instance, chest pain may be a symptom, but electrocardiogram (ECG) changes and elevated troponin levels are objective signs that help confirm myocardial infarction.

Furthermore, modern medicine applies the principles of evidence-based medicine in evaluating signs and symptoms. This approach requires clinical decisions to be based not only on subjective observation but also on scientifically validated data. As a result, diagnostic accuracy improves and treatment strategies become more effective.

In pharmaceutical and clinical practice, a deep understanding of these concepts is essential, as the correct selection and use of drugs directly depend on the proper interpretation of clinical signs and symptoms. For example, fever as a symptom may occur in various infectious diseases, but determining whether its cause is bacterial or viral requires laboratory signs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, signs and symptoms are among the most important fundamental elements in clinical medicine for disease identification and diagnosis. Symptoms are based on the patient's subjective experiences and reflect the early clinical presentation of a disease, while signs are objective findings identified through medical examinations and play a crucial role in confirming the diagnosis.

Correct differentiation and combined analysis of these two concepts improve the accuracy of differential diagnosis and reduce clinical errors. The modern approach of evidence-based medicine is also based on the comprehensive evaluation of both signs and symptoms, which enhances early disease detection and effective treatment.

Furthermore, in pharmaceutical and clinical practice, a deep understanding of these concepts plays an important role in the proper selection and use of medications. Therefore, accurately distinguishing between signs and symptoms is considered an essential professional competence for healthcare specialists.

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