Nursing Practice within the Medical Area

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3.1 Clinical Observation

The observation of the patient is a major part of nurses’ work. In cooperation with other professional groups (e.g. doctors, allied health professionals), the exchange of correct and meaningful information is highly important. All members of the team need to understand the facts about the patient. A targeted observation of the behaviour and bodily functions of the patient is necessary, in order that changes or diseases can be detected as quickly as possible. This chapter introduces the various areas of clinical observation: observation of the skin, observation of temperature, observation of pulse and blood pressure, observation of respiratory rate, observation of fluid balance, observation of excretion and observation of mobility.

Questions/Discussion
1. What areas of a patient can be observed?
2. Why is clinical observation important?

3.1.1 Observation of the Skin

The skin is the largest organ of the body. Skin has a surface area of 1.5–2 m² and a weight of about 2.5–3 kg.

Note

**Dermatosis** is a general term used to describe any defect or lesion on the skin.

- **Skin Colour**

Healthy skin is well supplied with blood and is pale pink in colour. The colour depends on blood flow, haemoglobin content, thickness of the epidermis (outer skin) and pigmentation. Because skin thickness is not uniform, skin colour on the body varies from place to place.

**Redness** is always a sign of increased blood flow.

Dilation of the blood vessels can be due to

- cold stimulus,
- high ambient temperatures,
- physical activity (sports, work),
- fever,
- burns, including sunburn and
- emotional events, such as joy, anger, shame or excitement.

**Blue colouration** can occur due to

- vascular contraction, caused by prolonged exposure to cold and
- lack of O₂ in the blood supply, i.e. cyanosis, for example in dyspnoea or chronic lung disease.