

Sample Short Answer Exam Question 4th yr MBChB

Tony is a 35 year old Asian male who is arrested after assaulting his next door neighbour. He complains of auditory hallucinations telling him that his next door neighbour is a paedophile and the only way to save the children in the suburb is to kill him.

Tony has previous convictions for assault, drunk while in charge of a vehicle and possession of a 'p' pipe. He spent 18 months in prison for the assault charge and was released one month ago. He is due in court next week regarding a male assault female charge committed one week after release.

Tony has never worked and receives unemployment benefit.

When you see him in the emergency room, he is pacing around the room, sweating profusely and picking at his arms which are covered in scabs. His left hand is swollen and red.

He states that he has had contact with the psychiatric services whilst in prison and was discharged on lorazepam and 'some other medication that helped me sleep'. He admits that he stopped the latter two days after release. He kept taking the lorazepam as well as some clonazepam he got from some friends.

- a. What is your differential diagnosis list?
- b. What are the risk issues? Please be specific.
- c. If you were to manage Tony's case as a GP, how will you proceed in the next few weeks?

Model Answer provided to markers:

- a. Differential Diagnosis

Alcohol withdrawal/ delirium tremens

Psychotic disorder like Chronic Schizophrenia/ Schizoaffective Disorder

Psychosis due to substances

Withdrawal from benzodiazepines

Polysubstance abuse or dependence

Akathisia

For a student to get full marks for the item, the student should have considered different possibilities including a primary psychotic disorder and a substance related condition.

- b. Risk issues
 - a. Risk to others- assaulting neighbour or other people in the future due to delusions and hallucinations
 - b. Risk to others- from driving whilst intoxicated
 - c. Risk to self- from driving whilst intoxicated
 - d. Self care issues- hand most probably swollen from using drug paraphernalia

For a student to get full marks, they should have considered more than 1 risk issue.

- c. If you were to manage Tony's case, how will you proceed in the next few weeks?

ANS:

- a. Safety- patient needs to be admitted because of acute risks. Mental Health Act may be involved.
- b. Need to clarify the diagnosis- is this primary psychosis? Or substance? Or mixed?
- c. Complete physical and neurologic examination
- d. Drug screen
- e. Develop rapport/ therapeutic alliance
- f. commence on antipsychotic
- g. monitor for possible benzo/ alcohol withdrawal and treat accordingly
- h. For his substance problem- consider alcohol and drug services
- i. Education about the illness
- j. Liaison with prison services, get medical records
- k. Liaison with GP, psychiatric services, family
- l. Cultural services may be helpful as he is Asian

This is a difficult question for a 4th year medical student who has not actually managed cases. Also, this case was written specifically to be vague to make the student think of different angles of management.

Give the student full marks if they show that they can manage the patient at different levels- acutely (by hospitalising, commencing on meds), clarifying diagnosis (physical, neuro, labs, getting more info), involving alcohol/ drug services and looking at psychosocial needs.

If they do not mention hospitalisation, which is a major safety issue, they can only get a maximum of 2 marks. At the very least, they have to be safe.