Thyroid Examination

Introduction

- Wash hands, Introduce self, ask Patient name & DOB & what they like to be called, Explain examination and get consent
- Expose patient’s neck

General Inspection

- Patient: stable, posture, anxious/ nervous, hot/ cold, facial complexion (myxoedema, flushed), obvious muscle wasting, BMI, obvious swellings, dry hair/ waxy skin
- Around bed

Hands

- Fine tremor: patient holds arms and hands stretched out, fingers straight and separated. Can see easily if you place a sheet of paper on top of hands.
- Nails: thyroid acropachy, onycholysis
- Palms: moist&sweaty/ cold&dry, palmar erythema (thyrotoxicosis)
- Pulse (tachycardia and AF in thyrotoxicosis)

Face

- Generally: waxy pale skin, hair loss (especially outer 1/3 eyebrows), myxoedema* (hypothyroidism)
- Eyes: lid retraction (upper eye lid), exophthalmos (sclera above and below iris), proptosis (forward protrusion of eye; look from above and side)
- Extra-ocular muscles: H-test and ask about diplopia (ophthalmoplegia = Grave’s), lid lag

Neck

- Inspection (from front): swellings, scars, swallow, stick out tongue (thyroglossal cyst moves on tongue protrusion), hands above head (Pemberton’s sign = retrosternal goitre compresses SVC and results in venous congestion)
- Palpation 1 (from behind): thyroid gland (over 2nd, 3rd, 4th tracheal cartilages) + while patient swallows and sticks out tongue
- Palpation 2 (from behind): full cervical lymph node exam
- Percussion over sternum: for retrosternal goitre
- Auscultation: thyroid bruit over each lobe

Finally

- Proximal myopathy (patient stand up with arms crossed; shrug shoulders against resistance)
- Reflexes (increased in hyperthyroidism, decreased in hypothyroidism)
- Look for pretibial myxoedema* (Grave’s)

To complete

- Thank patient
- Summarise and suggest further investigations you would do after a full history (e.g. TFTS, thyroid USS)

*NB. myxoedema = “soft tissue swelling”

Specific conditions
- Diffuse goitre
- Multinodular goitre
- Solitary thyroid nodule
- Cancer
- Hyperthyroidism
- Hypothyroidism
- Thyroiditis

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