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Cranial Nerve and Special Senses Screening

Practical 12 / Supervised clinical examination

Aim

Screen cranial nerve functions and report the method and laterality of findings.

Principle

Cranial nerves can be tested using visual, ocular motor, facial, hearing and bulbar tasks. Findings are most useful when described as functions and compared on both sides.

Materials and Requirements

- Standardised patient or volunteer
- Penlight, visual target and optional tuning fork
- Nerve function checklist

Procedure

1. Check vision and confrontation fields as taught, then compare pupils and direct and consensual responses.
2. Ask about visual, auditory and swallowing symptoms and obtain consent. Confirm corrective lenses if needed and test each eye separately for acuity and gross fields.
3. Inspect pupil sizes in even light. Bring a small light from the side to check the direct and consensual constriction and note the eye tested and any asymmetry.
4. Test ocular movements, asking about diplopia and observing any movement limitation or nystagmus.

Continue with step 5 on the next page.

Procedure Continued

Cranial Nerve and Special Senses Screening

5. Hold the target at a comfortable distance. Ask the volunteer to keep the head still and follow it through the standard gaze positions. Stop on sustained discomfort or diplopia and record the direction.
6. Compare facial sensation and movement, and use an appropriate screening method for hearing.
7. Compare light touch across facial divisions and ask for eyebrow elevation, tight eye closure and smiling. Check each ear using the approved hearing screen and describe any limitation.
8. Observe voice, palate movement, shoulder shrug and tongue movement as appropriate to the station.
9. Observe voice quality, palate elevation, shoulder shrug and tongue position or movement as appropriate. Report abnormal findings with their side, associated signs and the nerve pathway that may be involved.

Precautions

- Avoid forceful or irritating stimuli. Use a model or supplied findings for invasive or distressing tests.
- Escalate acute new focal findings to the supervisor.

Observations and Interpretation

Cranial Nerve and Special Senses Screening

Observations and Record

Item	What to record	What it tells you
Vision and pupils	Acuity or fields and light responses	Records afferent and efferent clues
Eye movements and face	Deviation, diplopia or asymmetry	Localises cranial function
Hearing and bulbar function	Method and side	Supports an organised report

Worked Example

A simulated right eye fails to abduct on right gaze. Confirm that the finding is consistent and assess the remaining movements before presenting a possible right abducens pathway deficit.

Result and Interpretation

Summarise which functions were tested, any laterality and why a follow-up examination may be needed.

Viva Questions and Answers

What limb of the pupil light reflex does the optic nerve carry?

The afferent visual input.

Which muscle abducts the eye?

Lateral rectus, supplied by cranial nerve VI.

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