

Clinical Judgement

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Clinical Judgment: What Is It, and How Does It Contribute to Diagnostic Errors?

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Errors in diagnosis are a serious concern in healthcare from a patient safety perspective as well as a medical liability standpoint. MedPro closed claims data show that allegations related to diagnostic errors are prevalent across specialties and healthcare locations. Closed claims data also show that clinical judgment is a major risk factor in diagnosis-related allegations.



Clinical judgment refers to the thought process (clinical reasoning) that allows healthcare providers to arrive at a conclusion (clinical decision-making) based on objective and subjective information about a patient. An article in the *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice* explains that "Clinical judgment is developed through practice, experience, knowledge and continuous critical analysis. It extends into all medical areas: diagnosis, therapy, communication and decision making."¹

Clinical judgment can involve both automatic, intuitive reasoning and analytic, reflective reasoning. These types of reasoning are not mutually exclusive; healthcare providers might switch their judgment strategy based on the circumstances they encounter. Further, because the cognitive processes involved in clinical judgment are complex, they are prone to various cognitive errors, such as faulty heuristics/cognitive biases and affective influences.²

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