

THE COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS OF CANADA
CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION IN FAMILY MEDICINE

SIMULATED OFFICE ORAL

PATIENT: MR. BILL SNOOK

CASE DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

You are Mr. **BILL SNOOK**, a 42-year-old brewery worker. You are new to this practice. Your last family physician (FP), **DR. IVANY**, dismissed you from his practice. You have been having problems with a burning pain behind the front of your chest, and would like the candidate to see if he or she can help with this.

You are also aware that you may have a problem with excessive gambling. You are a little unsure about whether this FP can help you with this problem.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

For the past 12 months, you have been experiencing a sensation of "burning" behind the bone in the front of your chest. The sensation is not always there, and sometimes you feel as if the pain has gone for good. However, it returns after a day or so, and seems to originate in your upper stomach. It is worse shortly after eating and because of your lifestyle, your mealtimes are quite erratic. Fatty meals seem to be worse than others. You have also noticed that the pain is worse when you lie down; on two or three occasions you have been awoken at night by a burning sensation in your chest, and a sour acid taste in your mouth. Your morning cup of black coffee, which you sometimes have with a chocolate bar, also seems to worsen the symptoms.

The pain comes on suddenly and is sharp and burning. It lasts for several hours. It does not radiate to your back or your arm, but sometimes it feels as if it is going into the back of your throat.

You have had no weight loss. You have not vomited blood. Your stools have not changed colour, and your bowel habits are unchanged. You do not get short of breath with the pain, although you often wake up with a dry, hacking cough. You have also noticed that your voice has become a little hoarse in the past four months. Occasionally you feel nauseated but you have not vomited.

You have never had any palpitations, crushing pains in your chest, or sweating. The pain is not worsened by walking or exercise. You have never had any swelling or pain in your legs and you have not coughed up any blood. You have no fevers or chills. You have had no alteration in your usual diet or any recent foreign travel. You have no difficulty swallowing.

You have no known medical problems. You have never had any surgery. As far as you know, you have no food sensitivity. There is no known family history of bowel complaints or heart disease. Your weight is stable. You have never had any trauma to your abdomen or chest.

You have recently bought some calcium carbonate tablets (Tums) from the local pharmacy, and these seem to give you temporary relief. Likewise, an occasional glass of milk in the mornings before you go to work seems to aid the problem. However, the symptoms return about 30 minutes later.

A union representative at work noticed that you were eating a lot of Tums during the day, and he said that you had "heartburn". He also said that his father had suffered from "heartburn" for many years, before the doctors realized he actually had angina. He suggested that you see a doctor about this, which prompted the original consultation with Dr. Ivany. The term "heartburn" wasn't particularly frightening but now after these comments from your rep, you have become a little worried about your heart. After all, everyone has heard stories about people having stomach aches and chest pains, and the next thing you know, they're having open heart surgery or they're dead because the doctors took too long to find the right diagnosis.

You rarely see a doctor, but you went to see your FP about this problem about nine months ago. He asked you to go for some blood tests and a special type of X-ray, whereby you would be given a sort of dye to drink and the outline of your stomach would be seen. He was due to see you again after this was done, to discuss results and possible treatment options. You never went for the blood tests or the X-ray, and although you made three further appointments to see Dr. Ivany, you never kept any of these or called to cancel. You felt that the doctor didn't really sound interested in your heart, and "other things" (i.e., visits to the local casino) seemed to take priority over the tests and follow-up appointments. Unfortunately for you, the clinic had a policy of removing patients who were "no shows" multiple times, and you received a letter one month ago asking you to seek a new FP.

As far as you know, nobody in your family has ever had heart trouble, and you're not particularly overweight. However, you DO smoke and rarely get any exercise except for walking home at night.

Apart from requiring you to take a lot of Tums at work, this condition hasn't really affected your work. It awakens you intermittently at night, which is an inconvenience, and makes you drink more black coffee the following day. Overall, the term "angina" has made you a little anxious and worried about your future health. You would like to be told that your heart is okay, and maybe get something for the pain. You would not be averse to some hints about changing your lifestyle, as you are beginning to suspect that changes are long overdue. You'd like to find a doctor who will reassure you about your heart, and perhaps provide the "nudge" you need to change your lifestyle. If your heart is in trouble, perhaps you should build bridges with your family before it's too late. You haven't seen them for many years, and you call your mother only very rarely.

You get one half day a week off work, plus weekends; hence, any appointments must be at this time. All tests that were arranged for you were scheduled during this time off, but you have been unable to attend any of them as you have other activities. After the last doctor's letter, you are beginning to wonder if these activities are becoming too "obsessive" and are interfering negatively with your life.

Gambling Addiction

Your daughter, **GEORGINA CRANT**, wrote to you two months ago, asking you to attend her high school graduation in six weeks' time. You have never met your daughter, although she is friends with your parents, and this letter has made you wonder if you should start to build bridges with her and the rest of your family. However, you have a significant problem with finances.

Each half day off, every night, and most weekend days, you go to a casino that has "slot machine" games for public use. You can spend hours at a time at these machines, and when you are "in the zone" you seem to lose all idea of time. Years ago, before the laws changed, you smoked heavily at the machine for most of the night; now you take a "smoke break" outside every hour or so, and therefore you have cut down from smoking ten to five cigarettes a night. Some nights, when you are really "in the zone", you do not smoke at all. You rarely eat or drink. You sometimes drink a bottle of beer simply to quench your thirst in the hot environment, but you never have more than one a night. A bottle of beer is useful for "saving" the machine that you are playing when you go outside to smoke. It also stops the waitresses from continually bothering you. Sometimes you barely touch the drink. You do NOT have a drinking problem. On your way home, late at night, you frequently pick up a hot dog (preferably covered in onions and chili sauce) from an all-night convenience store, and eat it as you walk. You live about two kilometres from the casino, and so the walk isn't too arduous.

If you are out particularly late, perhaps until 2 am, you get only four hours of sleep, as work starts at 8 am and your alarm goes off at 6:30. Breakfast is therefore a rushed affair, usually comprising of strong black coffee and a chocolate bar, gulped down before you catch the bus to work. If you have two late nights in a row (which is almost the norm nowadays), you get quite tired at work and tend to drink more black coffee in an effort to keep yourself awake. You take an ibuprofen tablet intermittently, once or twice a month, to ease muscle aches and pains.

The urge to play on the gambling machines started about five years ago, when you first moved to this city. On paydays (Thursdays) your colleagues got on a local city bus and went out to the nearby casino. There were slot machines in abundance, and so you would sit at one of them and play it for about an hour or so before everybody left. You had no family to go home to only a small apartment, and so you would stay behind a little longer and have a few more cigarettes and a few more plays before leaving. Your first apartment in this city was in quite a nice area, and money was no issue then; the taxi ride was a pleasant end to the evening. You started to enjoy the Thursday evenings out, and, after a year had gone by, you found yourself going most weekends, as well.

Some machines you got to know very well, and certainly you had your favourites. Some of them paid out more money at certain times of the evening. You had a careful system for playing these favourites, which rarely changed from day to day. In the early days, your cigarettes were always on your right, you deposited \$10 (and no less) at one time, and used "nudges" and "holds" only twice (each) every 30 minutes. When you were playing, you hated to have your concentration disturbed by anybody talking to you, especially when you were "in the game" and close to winning. Gradually you became more fixated upon the machines and their flashing lights and less upon your colleagues. If disturbed when a big payout was "just about to come along", you often "snapped" at that person and were quite rude; then you usually left that area because of the "bad vibe" and lost concentration. Your work colleagues slowly learned to keep their distance, and would often try to avoid you.

After three years or so in the city, you had no friends left. This was no problem, as you were now free to go to the casino EVERY NIGHT! The bus from work took you there, but money for your taxi home was suddenly becoming hard to find. Savings helped a bit, but they were running short. You moved out of your rather "high-end" apartment, and began to rent in a more rundown, cheaper area of the city. It was conveniently located only about two kilometres from the casino, a fact that certainly influenced your choice. A few months after your move to the new area, you were going to the casino every night, every half day, and every weekend.

Most of the times you lose, and frequently (about once a week), you forget to save enough money to get some food on the way home, and thus spend the whole evening without eating. When you win you feel exhilarated, euphoric, and excited, and this is a marvellous sensation to have. You describe it as being like a "rush". These rushes are what keep you coming back to the casino. Straight after a win, you notice that you have the urge to *increase* the rush by playing some more; in the past you always walked away after a win. Now, even when you lose and

get ready to leave the casino, part of you wants to go back inside to try *just one more time!* The wins and rushes occur only about once a week, and the following day you love to tell all your colleagues about your success! If you lose money, which is the norm, you *don't* share this information. Because of your rudeness to your colleagues when you are playing the machines in the casino, you don't, in fact, have many friends at work so the thrill of telling anybody is not as great as it used to be.

In the first few months of going to the casino, your expenditure each Thursday night was only \$10 to \$20. One evening can now cost you \$50 to \$100. The cost is about double that for each weekend day. In the past few months, there have been one or two nights when you have lost up to \$150. Once a week you will be "up", once a week you will be left with no money whatsoever, and the rest of the time you will be down about \$50 by the time you leave the casino. As you leave on these nights, you get the urge to return, just one more time...

For the past 18 months you have been at the slot machines nightly, and you have barely enough money to pay rent or eat proper meals. A month's expenditure can be around \$2,000. You earn just under \$6,000 a month, before taxes. Banks have stopped giving you short-term loans as you have defaulted on two of these in the past (\$500 each). Likewise, your credit card was cancelled ten months ago for a similar reason. You are slowly paying off the bank and the Visa company with the minimum monthly payments and have not, as yet, had to declare bankruptcy. You have never borrowed from colleagues or taken up offers of cheap cash advances from dubious sources. You are too embarrassed to ask your mother for money. You have never sold street drugs to get money, but you have sold your TV, DVD player, and computer to get a quick cash injection. You no longer have a phone line, and make calls through pay phones. So far, you have done nothing illegal apart from defaulting on your loans and being late with your rent on occasion. You are not currently in debt to anybody except for the bank and the Visa company.

If, for some reason, your trip to the casino is delayed by work, you feel restless, agitated, and unhappy. To prevent this feeling, you now go straight to the casino when work ends.

Every week you buy a Lotto 6/49 ticket. In your apartment are numerous slips of old gambling tickets. They are in every room, in every drawer, and even in boxes hidden away under your bed. You always play the same numbers, and one day, these numbers WILL come up. You firmly believe that *one day* you will get a HUGE win, and this will allow you to pay off all your debts.

You are NOT depressed.

The letter from your last doctor, the cancellation of your credit card, comments by your landlord and union rep, and letters from the bank have made you realize that you could have a problem. Your daughter's letter has given you a "goal" to work toward, as you would dearly love to go to meet her. You have no friends to talk to, and thus a doctor's visit may be a good opportunity to get some facts about how to alter your lifestyle. Managers at work don't seem to like you, and your colleagues don't want to talk to you. You are willing to make a change, but you have no idea how to do it and don't know if the doctor can help in any way.

MEDICAL HISTORY

There is nothing of note in your medical history. You rarely visit a doctor.

SURGERY

You have had no surgical procedures.

MEDICATIONS

You take ibuprofen (about one to two tablets a month) for intermittent aches and pains. Recently you have been taking some Tums.

LABORATORY RESULTS

None.

ALLERGIES

None.

IMMUNIZATIONS

Up to date.

LIFESTYLE ISSUES

Tobacco:

You have smoked since age 16. Originally you smoked about 25 cigarettes a day; you now smoke about five.

Alcohol:

You drink one bottle of light (4% alcohol) beer a day.

Illicit Drugs:

You do not use any illegal drugs.

Exercise and Recreation:

You get almost no exercise. Walking home from work or the casino is the only exercise you get.

FAMILY HISTORY

You know of no illnesses that run in the family. Your father and brother were chain-smoking, hard-drinking men, both with violent tempers. Your father's brother, **TIM**, was always the "life and soul" of any party, was full of "get rich quick" schemes, and had a seemingly endless supply of pretty women by his side. You believe that, before you left home, he was told he was "manic-depressive."

There is no history of heart disease.

Nobody in your family has had a gambling problem, and aside from alcohol and nicotine addictions, there is no drug addiction.

PERSONAL HISTORY

Childhood, Adolescence, and Early Adulthood

You were the younger of two boys born to a working class family. Your father, **GARY**, was a steelworker who had a violent temper when he was drunk, and he frequently beat his wife and children. Much to your disgust, your mother, to whom you were very close, was forever supporting your father – even when she was sporting obvious bruises on her face.

Your mother, **GEORGINA**, was born in eastern Quebec, and thus you have dual Canadian and American citizenship, as does she. She met your father when she was on a camping holiday in the United States, and moved there to be with him in the late 1950s.

Both you and your brother **TERRY** were born in Pittsburgh. Terry was five years older than you. Your mother had a series of miscarriages before you were born.

Childhood memories are not that nice, and consist mainly of your father coming home drunk after an afternoon shift at the steelworks and the family arguments that followed. You left high school as soon as possible and entered the then-booming steel industry, just as your father had done a generation earlier and your brother had done five years earlier. Terry, like your father, was a heavy drinker. He lived on the "wild side", working hard and playing even harder.

Because of the example your father set, you were always wary of drinking and its consequences, but (at that time) you did spend a few Friday nights out, after payday, with Terry and your fellow workers. The others at the steel plant admired him a lot because he had charm, charisma, a huge physique, and a seemingly endless capacity to drink! After one particularly heavy night out, he tried to drive home and suffered a horrific car crash. He appeared to be travelling at high speed when severely drunk, and lost control of his car. He crashed into a roadside pillar and was killed instantly, according to the coroner. This sudden death, and the beatings that your mother was taking, led you to decide to leave home once and for all.

Move to Canada

Terry died when he was 28 and you were 23. You both had been living with your parents at the time, and you were in an "on-again, off-again" relationship with **TRACY CRANT**. You decided to take Tracy and your mother to Canada to get away from bad memories and a drunken father. Initially, your mother agreed to leave, but after spending a few months with her parents on the east coast, she changed her mind and went back to your father. He promised to "reform and change his ways" if she came back. Your mother writes on your birthday and at Christmas. You fear that your father still blames you for your mother's leaving, and you are scared to return. Your mother's letters tell you that your father sought help from doctors for his drinking and anger, and has been a reformed character (as he promised he would be) ever since her return. "We all want you home", your mother keeps writing in her letters. After each letter you call her, often from work, but simply tell her where you are living and say that you are "doing well".

Daughter

Tracy left a few months after your mother, leaving you alone in Canada. She missed home and her parents and wanted to get back to Pittsburgh. At that time, your relationship wasn't going well and money was tight, and this move wasn't entirely unexpected. After getting back home, she contacted you and told you that she was pregnant. She later gave birth to a little girl, whom she named after your mother. You have not seen Tracy since her move back home, and you have never seen your daughter, although they write to you once a year. Tracy never married, and now she works as a nurse in a small hospital outside Pittsburgh. She never asked you for any money or support. Your daughter is a teenager and is doing well in high school, according to the last letter you got at Christmas. In her latest letter, Georgina asked if you could come down to see her when she graduates from high school later this year. Tracy and your daughter have remained in contact with your parents, and have a good, close relationship with them.

Current Desire to See Family

Now that you are worried about your heart and your way of life and have no strong ties to this city, you are tempted to make contact with your daughter and other family members after all these years. You are forgetting the hard times of the past and your father genuinely seems to have stopped drinking over the past 15 years. Tracy always seems keen to see you again, and the time may be right for a major life change and heading back to the United States. You probably cannot afford a major move back home, but maybe you could save up enough money by doing some overtime shifts and forgoing a few casino trips.

EDUCATION AND WORK HISTORY

You left school at 16 and went into the steelworks, like your father and brother before you. In the early 1980s, Pittsburgh was a boom town and the auto industry was demanding more and more steel.

Your family situation led you to leave home. First you went to stay with your mother's parents, who still lived on the east coast of Canada, but this lasted for only a month or two. Then you rented an apartment wherever the jobs and money took you, and, after your mother and Tracy returned to the United States, you started work as a deckhand for the east coast cod fisheries. This worked out well for a few years before the cod stocks disappeared, thus ushering in the era of the moratorium and the downsizing of the Atlantic fisheries. You were out of work by 1992, at the age of 25.

Luckily you found a job, within a year, in the local brewery. Shortly after, this was taken over by a big multinational company. You have worked in the brewery industry ever since, slowly climbing up the promotional ladder. You are now working on the factory floor, supervising the bottling for the company's most popular brew. You went wherever the company sent you, and you arrived here about five years ago. At that time you were moderately well off, with savings of about \$20,000, and thus initially you were able to rent a nice apartment. Things have changed since then.

You now live in a rented apartment that is little more than a living room, bathroom, and bedroom. You have no TV or cable, as you simply cannot afford these items after gambling most of your income and savings away. Twice in the past year you have had notices from your landlord about being late with your rent (and underpaying), and he would love to get you out of the apartment so he could clean it up and rent it for more money.

You are frequently late for work, and, when you are tired, you spend much of the day drinking black coffee. You take "smoke breaks" in an area outside the bottling plant. When you first arrived, this was a popular thing to do, but now you are the only employee who uses the area. Management would like to remove it altogether. The amount you smoke has decreased considerably, and you go through about five cigarettes each working day. Some days you don't smoke at all. Even so, your late

arrival for work and frequent absences from the floor of the bottling plant have led higher management to send you two "warning" letters in the past year. You feel that management would not be averse to removing you from the workforce either, although this is just a suspicion based upon the tone of the letters. Your union rep defended you in both cases, but also commented that you should seriously consider going to a doctor about your "heartburn". He also suggested that you get a general check-up as you were becoming a "serious train wreck" of a person. These comments really alarmed you, and your worry has worsened since you received your former FP's letter asking you to find a new doctor.

The brewery has recently seen a huge upturn in the demand for its beer, and workers are being asked to do overtime shifts so that the production line can operate 24 hours a day. Overtime is DOUBLE pay, but staying longer at work makes you anxious and agitated as you are wasting time that could be spent getting that "big payout" at the casino.

FINANCES

You earn \$39 an hour and work 4 1/2 days a week. Money is very tight right now, as your expenses at the casino are leaving you almost penniless. You have no savings and you have sold any items of value. After taxes and gambling, you have barely enough to pay the rent (\$500 a month in one of the more rundown suburbs).

The brewery company has been putting money into pension schemes for its employees for many years. So far you haven't touched this money. You also receive good medical and dental benefits from the company.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

You have very few social supports. Your work colleagues barely talk to you as you are a bit of a loner. If they approach you at the casino after work, you are often "in the game" if you are playing a machine, and you hate to be disturbed. They all have wives and families, and this is hardly your scene. All your family members are back in Pittsburgh, including your ex-girlfriend and your daughter.

Before moving here, you had a few casual relationships with women, but nothing serious. In the past, you visited prostitutes (not in this city), with whom you always practised safe sex. Now that your evenings and weekends are spent in the casino, you have no time to make any lasting relationship.

RELIGION

You have no religious affiliation.

EXPECTATIONS

You would like the doctor to take you on as a patient, and you want some sympathy and help to get your life back on track. All you need is a little encouragement, and you know you can get over this problem. After all, admitting that you have a problem is the first step, isn't it? Your smoking habit has decreased immensely in the past year, from 25 cigarettes a day down to about five a day, and you feel quite proud of this; with a bit of encouragement, maybe you could quit altogether.

You want to be reassured that your heart is okay, and you would also like to know what you can do about the pain. If this involves altering your lifestyle, then you will happily try to do this. You are determined to follow through with whatever this doctor says, as being "dropped" by your previous doctor and told that you are a "train wreck" by your union rep have really opened your eyes to the state you are in.

You now realize that your gambling is a major problem. You barely have enough money to live on, and you are painfully close to losing your job and your accommodation because of your habits. You have no idea if doctors know anything about gambling; they can help with mental problems, like your uncle's and with alcoholism, such as your father's, but is gambling in the same category? Surely this is just a lifestyle choice. However, as you have nobody else to talk to, you will listen to whatever this doctor has to say and adhere to the advice. A doctor, you have always felt, is a wise person who should be respected; if he or she suggests that you try to rebuild bridges back home with your family, then that is exactly what you will do. Maybe a few overtime shifts will tear you away from the casino, build up your finances for a trip to see your family, AND improve relations with your co-workers...

ACTING INSTRUCTIONS

You are unshaven and unkempt. Your clothes are those you work in and they are crumpled and unwashed. You have no jewellery and no rings. You are very shy and withdrawn, and feel awkward in social settings. Thus, at the beginning of the visit you don't make much eye contact. A friendly candidate will rapidly gain your trust and you will become progressively more sociable and talkative.

You know that your life is a mess. You readily accept ANY advice from the doctor, as this is your only real social contact, and a chance to tell your story. An empathic, non-judgemental candidate will get you to open up fully and tell the whole story. Someone who thinks you are an addict and that there is "no hope for you" will simply cause you to remain sullen, monosyllabic, and quiet.

As you aren't sure whether a doctor is somebody who can actually help with your gambling or your "train wreck" of a life, you definitely do NOT volunteer this information to any candidate who goes "fishing" for a second problem early in the interview (e.g., by asking whether there is any other problem you want to talk about). Indeed, the heartburn is the reason you're at the candidate's office, and you haven't really worked out how to bring up the subject of your lifestyle. A good candidate will ask why your last doctor removed you from his practice, and why you didn't go for any tests or follow-up appointments; this would be a good opportunity to bring up your gambling problem, especially if you like the candidate. Otherwise, unless the topic has already been mentioned, a ten-minute prompt of "I think my life is a mess" is about as much as you will give away.

A candidate definitely needs a patient-centred approach with this SOO. Empathy and the sharing of ideas will go a long way in gaining your trust and, therefore, the whole story. A candidate who asks direct, close-ended questions and judges you harshly will simply receive one-word answers and thus fail to pick up key points.

If the candidate asks, you say there was never any conflict between you and your former FP. You simply failed to show up for appointments.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BILL SNOOK:	The patient, age 42, a brewery worker with GERD and a gambling addiction.
GARY SNOOK:	Bill's father, age 70.
GEORGINA SNOOK:	Bill's mother, age 67.
TERRY SNOOK:	Bill's brother, who was killed in an automobile accident 19 years ago, at age 28.
TIM SNOOK:	Bill's uncle.
TRACY CRANT:	Bill's ex-girlfriend, age 40.
GEORGINA CRANT:	Bill and Tracy's daughter, age 18.
DR. IVANY:	Bill's former FP.

TIMELINE

Today:	Appointment with the candidate.
1 month ago:	“Dropped” by Dr. Ivany.
2 months ago:	Received a letter from your daughter.
9 months ago:	First sought help about heartburn.
10 months ago:	Credit card cancelled.
11 months ago:	Late with the rent; received a letter from the landlord.
1 year ago, age 41:	First noticed heartburn.
18 months ago, age 40:	Started going to the casino more often.
5 years ago, age 37:	Moved here and started playing the slot machines.
16 years ago, age 26:	Started work in the brewery industry.
18 years ago, age 24:	Daughter born after your mother and girlfriend had returned to the United States; started work in the fisheries industry.
19 years ago, age 23:	Left home with your mother and girlfriend and came to Canada, following your brother’s death.
26 years ago, age 16:	Left high school and began working in the steel industry.
42 years ago:	Born in Pittsburgh.