

Obtaining a Throat Swab from a Patient

Introduction

Throat swabs are a physician's second line of gathering information about the kind of problem a patient may be having when a patient presents complaining of a sore throat. It is, more and more, being left up to the nurse or lab tech to obtain an adequate throat specimen for culturing or for microscopic preparation by staining. It is, therefore, of immense importance that a GOOD specimen be obtained by the nurse or lab tech.

Although in this experiment you will be using a cotton-tipped swab for obtaining the throat sample, keep in mind that cotton swabs are on their way out of the clinical picture. This is because the fatty acids in the cotton kill some of the pathogenic bacteria and a good specimen is not obtained. At present, either wool impregnated charcoal swabs or calcium alginate swabs are the material/swabs of choice since they do not have this nasty effect.

Materials and Methods

Materials

Cotton swabs	Biohazard Bag	Sterilizer	Gloves
Lab Stool	Light source	Disinfectant	Tongue blades

Methods

Make certain the patient is seated comfortably. Open the package of swabs from the split end toward the cotton-tipped end about half way. Grasp one swab and remove it from the package. Ask your patient to open his/her mouth widely, to stick out his/her tongue and turn his/her head up towards the light source. Stand to the side of the patient as you are working. (This will protect you from them projecting their lunch on your clothes or from getting hit while you are taking the swab.) Introduce the swab into his/her mouth and swab the peritonsillar area on each side, if possible, while rotating the swab. AVOID HITTING THE HANGY-DOWNY THING!!!!!! The best sample is obtained if the patient gags, but NOT throws up. This is because the tissues compress the swab and impregnate the swab with a good sample. For this experiment, replace the used swab in its paper container and place it in the biohazard bag for sterilization.