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RCSI Aptitude Test: 30 sample questions with answers

Thirty multiple-choice questions in the format of the RCSI Overseas Aptitude Test theory paper (General Nurse), one from each of 30 topics on the RCSI reading list. Answer them first, then check Part 2, where every answer is explained and traced to its HSE, NMBI, NICE or HPSC source.

150	180 min	50%	2
questions in the real paper	72 seconds a question	pass mark	attempts, then the fee again

How to use it: set a timer for 36 minutes (72 seconds a question), no notes, no phone. Mark your answers on paper. Under 21 out of 30 (70%) means the topic list needs more work before you book. Write down which topics you missed: they are the ones to practise.

Part 1. Questions

1. CARDIOVASCULAR

The 2024 ESC hypertension guideline (on the RCSI reading list) uses three blood pressure categories. Which set is correct?

A Optimal below 100/60, normal 100 to 129/60 to 84, hypertension 130/85 or above

B Non-elevated below 120/70, elevated 120 to 139/70 to 89, hypertension 140/90 or above

C Low below 110/70, normal 110 to 159/70 to 99, hypertension 160/100 or above

D Normal below 130/80, stage 1 130 to 139/80 to 89, stage 2 140/90 or above

2. RESPIRATORY

How often does the HSE Chronic Disease Management programme review a patient with COPD in general practice?

- **A** Every five years
- **B** Once a year
- **C** Every three months
- **D** Twice a year

3. GASTROINTESTINAL

Peptic ulcers are usually the result of which of the following?

- **A** Fatty diet
- **B** Stress
- **C** Helicobacter pylori infection
- **D** Genetic defect

4. RENAL AND URINARY

What daily hygiene does the HSE recommend for a person with a long-term urinary catheter?

- **A** Change the catheter every day
- **B** Apply antibiotic cream to the entry site
- **C** Wash the entry site with soap and water twice daily
- **D** Clean inside the urethra with antiseptic daily

5. NEUROLOGICAL

What is the range of the total Glasgow Coma Scale score?

- **A** 1 to 20
- **B** 0 to 10
- **C** 5 to 25
- **D** 3 to 15

6. DIABETES

A relative gives glucagon to an unresponsive patient with type 1 diabetes. When does the HSE say to call 112 or 999?

- **A** If the person has not come round within 10 minutes of the injection
- **B** Only if a second glucagon injection is also unsuccessful
- **C** Immediately after giving glucagon, in every case
- **D** Once the person is awake and able to eat

7. SEPSIS

Blood cultures should be taken before antimicrobials unless doing so would delay the antimicrobials by more than how long?

- **A** 2 hours
- **B** 45 minutes
- **C** 15 minutes
- **D** 5 minutes

8. SKIN AND PRESSURE INJURY

A heel shows a persistent non-blanchable deep purple discolouration with intact skin. What is this?

- **A** Deep tissue pressure injury
- **B** A bruise needing no action
- **C** Stage 1 pressure injury
- **D** Incontinence-associated dermatitis

9. STOMA CARE

What is a stoma?

- **A** A hernia of bowel through a weakness in the abdominal wall
- **B** A surgical opening on the abdomen for bowel or urine output
- **C** A drain left in the abdomen after surgery to remove fluid
- **D** A feeding tube passed into the stomach through the abdomen

10. OSTEOPOROSIS

Which of these is a good source of calcium for someone who cannot take dairy?

- **A** Apples, pears and other fresh fruit
- **B** Coffee, tea and other hot drinks
- **C** Kale, tinned sardines and fortified foods
- **D** White bread, pasta and breakfast cereals

11. NUTRITION, MALNUTRITION AND OBESITY

A patient with obesity (BMI 34) is admitted acutely unwell and has taken almost nothing by mouth for 6 days. What is the MUST score?

- **A** MUST cannot be used when BMI is over 30
- **B** 1, medium risk, because intake is reduced
- **C** 0, low risk, because BMI is well above 20
- **D** 2, high risk, from the acute disease effect

12. PAIN

Why does the HSE say to seek medical advice after a paracetamol overdose even if the person feels well?

- **A** Risk of severe allergic reaction
- **B** Risk of delayed, serious liver damage
- **C** Risk of immediate cardiac arrest
- **D** Risk of kidney failure within an hour

13. OLDER PERSON CARE

According to NMBI Standard 1, what is the organising framework through which the nurse delivers person-centred care?

- **A** Assessment, need identification, planning, implementation, evaluation
- **B** Screening, referral, review, reporting and audit
- **C** Admission, observation, treatment, transfer and follow-up
- **D** Diagnosis, prescription, treatment, review and discharge

14. DELIRIUM

What is the attention task on the 4AT?

- **A** Months of the year backwards, starting at December
- **B** Drawing a clock face showing ten past eleven
- **C** Counting backwards from 20 to 1 without error
- **D** Naming three objects and recalling them later

15. DEMENTIA

What does mixed dementia mean?

- **A** A diagnosis that has not been confirmed
- **B** Dementia diagnosed before the age of 65
- **C** More than one type of dementia at the same time
- **D** Dementia alternating with normal cognition

16. FRAILTY AND DECONDITIONING

Which of the following can be a stressor that decompensates a person with frailty, according to the BGS?

- **A** A move to respite care or a new analgesic
- **B** Major surgery under general anaesthetic
- **C** A stroke or myocardial infarction
- **D** Pneumonia requiring admission

17. FALLS

What should happen at hospital discharge for a patient identified as at risk of falls, according to NICE?

- **A** Consider referral to community services for ongoing risk factors
- **B** Falls prevention ends when the patient leaves hospital
- **C** Advise the patient to rest in bed at home
- **D** Prescribe a sedative for the journey home

18. DEATH AND DYING

Anticipatory medicines have started to be given to a dying patient. How often does NICE say to monitor their effect?

- **A** At least daily, with feedback to the lead professional
- **B** Every 4 hours, recorded on the observation chart
- **C** Once a week, at the multidisciplinary meeting
- **D** Only if the family notices a change in symptoms

19. CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT

Which conditions are covered by the HSE Chronic Disease Management (CDM) Treatment Programme in general practice?

- **A** Osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and chronic back pain
- **B** Epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease and multiple sclerosis
- **C** Cancer, dementia and chronic kidney disease
- **D** Type 2 diabetes, COPD, asthma and cardiovascular disease

20. NURSING PROCESS IN THE ACUTE SITUATION

A nurse is concerned about a patient whose INEWS is 2 but who "does not look right". What does INEWS V2 permit?

- **A** Increasing observations to hourly without informing anyone
- **B** Documenting the concern and rechecking at the next round
- **C** Calling an urgent response on the basis of clinician concern
- **D** Nothing formal until the total score reaches 3 or more

21. PRE- AND POST-OPERATIVE CARE

What happens at the pre-operative check on the day of surgery, according to MedlinePlus?

- **A** Meet the anaesthesiologist and receive premedication
- **B** Shower with antiseptic and change into a gown
- **C** Have blood taken for group and save and cross-match
- **D** Confirm the surgery, mark the site, check vital signs, sign consent

22. FUNDAMENTALS OF NURSING CARE

What do the letters ADPIE stand for in the nursing process?

- **A** Assessment, Diagnosis, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation
- **B** Airway, Drugs, Pulse, Infusion, Escalation
- **C** Assess, Delegate, Prioritise, Inform, Escalate
- **D** Admission, Documentation, Prescription, Investigation, Education

23. INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Which of these is true of Klebsiella pneumoniae?

- **A** It spreads through the air over long distances and is caught by breathing in droplets from an infected person in the same room
- **B** It only causes disease in children under five, whose immune systems have not yet met the bacterium
- **C** It is always sensitive to amoxicillin, so a standard course of oral antibiotics clears it within a few days
- **D** It lives harmlessly in the gut and causes infection when it spreads elsewhere, often in hospital via hands, catheters or ventilators

24. MEDICATION AND DRUG CALCULATIONS

How many "rights" of medication administration does the NMBI 2020 guidance list?

- **A** Six
- **B** Five
- **C** Eight
- **D** Ten

25. PERIPHERAL VENOUS CATHETER AND IV THERAPY

Which level of aseptic technique does the Irish guidance require for inserting a midline catheter or a central venous access device?

- **A** Surgical aseptic technique with maximum sterile barrier precautions
- **B** Clean technique with hand hygiene, as for a peripheral cannula
- **C** No specific level; each ward decides according to local policy
- **D** Standard aseptic technique with non-sterile gloves, as for a PVC

26. SAFEGUARDING, CONSENT AND OPEN DISCLOSURE

An unconscious patient arrives after a road collision and needs immediate surgery. How does the HSE consent policy handle consent?

- **A** Two doctors sign on the patient's behalf
- **B** Proceed without consent to save life
- **C** The hospital manager gives consent
- **D** Wait until a relative signs the form

27. NMBI CODE AND PROFESSIONAL MATTERS

A patient's daughter phones the ward asking for her mother's test results. The patient is alert and competent. What does the Code require?

- **A** Refuse under all circumstances
- **B** Give the results after confirming date of birth
- **C** Obtain the patient's consent first and document it
- **D** Give the results because she is next of kin

28. SOCIAL PRESCRIBING AND COMMUNITY CARE

What are meals services (meals-on-wheels) and how are they accessed?

- **A** Hospital catering delivered after discharge
- **B** Meals for people who cannot prepare them, usually by referral
- **C** A supermarket delivery scheme funded by the HSE
- **D** Free restaurant vouchers for people on low incomes

29. TEACHING THE JUNIOR STUDENT NURSE

A preceptor tells a student, 'You are careless.' Which feature of good feedback, as described by NMBI, is missing?

- **A** Immediate: given at the earliest opportunity
- **B** Documented: recorded in the student's portfolio
- **C** Specific: focused on behaviours, not personalities, with suggestions
- **D** Balanced: includes positive feedback as well as areas to improve

30. ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY ESSENTIALS

What does glucagon do?

A Stimulates the stomach lining to secrete acid when food arrives

B Digests fats in the small intestine once bile has emulsified them

C Raises blood glucose by releasing stored glucose, secreted when glucose falls

D Lowers blood glucose by moving it into the cells, secreted after a meal

Part 2. Answers and explanations

1. B Non-elevated below 120/70, elevated 120 to 139/70 to 89, hypertension 140/90 or above

ESC 2024 (McEvoy et al., European Heart Journal 45(38)): office BP is classed as non-elevated (below 120/70 mmHg, no drug treatment), elevated (120 to 139/70 to 89 mmHg, drug treatment depending on cardiovascular risk and follow-up BP) and hypertension (140/90 mmHg or above, prompt confirmation and treatment in most). The 130/80 stage 1 definition is the 2017 American ACC/AHA scheme.

Source: ESC 2024 Guidelines for the management of elevated blood pressure and hypertension, BP classification

2. D Twice a year

HSE Chronic Disease Management programme: patients with COPD (and other eligible chronic conditions) with a medical card or GP visit card are reviewed twice a year in general practice by the GP and practice nurse.

Source: HSE: COPD symptoms

3. C Helicobacter pylori infection

HSE: ulcers form when the protective layer of the stomach lining breaks down, usually because of H. pylori infection or long-term or high-dose NSAID use (ibuprofen, aspirin). Stress and certain foods do not usually cause them. This is one of the RCSI published sample MCQs, whose answer options are exactly these four.

Source: HSE: Stomach ulcer

4. C Wash the entry site with soap and water twice daily

HSE: wash the area where the catheter enters the body with mild soap and water at least twice a day and after opening the bowels, and wash hands before and after touching the equipment. Antiseptics and creams are not recommended.

Source: HSE: Living with a urinary catheter

5. D 3 to 15

The GCS score combines the three components into a single index from 3 (no response) to 15 (fully alert). Eyes 4, Verbal 5, Motor 6 at maximum. A drop of 2 or more points, or any fall in motor score, is a red flag for escalation. GCS-P adds pupil reactivity.

Source: Glasgow Coma Scale: What is GCS

6. A If the person has not come round within 10 minutes of the injection

HSE: give glucagon, then call 112 or 999 if the person is not responding. If they do not come round within 10 minutes of the injection, whoever is with them should call an ambulance. Glucagon releases stored glucose from the liver and needs to be in date and stored in the fridge.

Source: HSE: Hypoglycaemia (hypos), type 1 diabetes

7. B 45 minutes

Cultures first, because antimicrobials given beforehand can make them falsely negative. But the antimicrobial must not wait more than 45 minutes for them. In practice, on a ward, you take the cultures while the antimicrobial is being prepared.

Source: HSE Sepsis Screening Tool for Adults (2025), Sepsis 6 step 1

8. A Deep tissue pressure injury

NPIAP: persistent non-blanchable deep red, maroon or purple discolouration with intact skin is a deep tissue pressure injury, from intense or prolonged pressure and shear at the bone-muscle interface. It may evolve rapidly to reveal the true extent.

Source: NPIAP: Pressure injury and stages (2016)

9. B A surgical opening on the abdomen for bowel or urine output

Irish Cancer Society: a stoma is an opening on the surface of the abdomen created by a surgeon so bowel motions (or urine) empty into a bag. A colostomy is formed from the large bowel, an ileostomy from the small bowel (ileum); a urostomy diverts urine.

Source: Irish Cancer Society: Caring for your stoma

10. C Kale, tinned sardines and fortified foods

Irish Osteoporosis Society: for people who cannot take dairy, kale, collards, okra, tinned salmon and sardines (with bones) and calcium-fortified foods and drinks are good sources of calcium.

Source: Irish Osteoporosis Society: About osteoporosis

11. D 2, high risk, from the acute disease effect

MUST: acute disease effect scores 2 when there is no nutritional intake for more than 5 days, regardless of BMI, so the total is 2 = high risk. Obesity does not protect against malnutrition during acute illness.

Source: BAPEN: Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST), steps 1 to 4

12. B Risk of delayed, serious liver damage

HSE: paracetamol overdose can cause serious liver damage that develops over 24 to 72 hours with few early symptoms, so medical advice is needed immediately even if the person feels well, because the antidote works best early.

Source: HSE: Paracetamol

13. A Assessment, need identification, planning, implementation, evaluation

NMBI Standard 1: the nurse delivers person-centred care through the nursing process of assessment, identification of needs, planning, implementation and evaluation, in partnership with the older person.

Source: NMBI Working with Older People (2015), Standard 1

14. A Months of the year backwards, starting at December

Item 3: "Please tell me the months of the year in backwards order, starting at December." One prompt (what is the month before December?) is permitted. Seven or more months correct scores 0, starting but under 7 or refusing scores 1, untestable because unwell, drowsy or inattentive scores 2.

Source: The 4AT screening instrument (IAEM Appendix 2)

15. C More than one type of dementia at the same time

Alzheimer Society of Ireland: mixed dementia means a person has more than one type at the same time, most often Alzheimer's disease with vascular dementia. Dementia under 65 is called young-onset dementia.

Source: Alzheimer Society of Ireland: What is dementia

16. A A move to respite care or a new analgesic

BGS: even apparently small events can decompensate a person with frailty, such as a move to short-term respite care, a trip to the emergency department after a fall, or a trial of a new analgesic. Major illnesses are stressors for anyone.

Source: British Geriatrics Society: Introduction to frailty (Fit for Frailty)

17. A Consider referral to community services for ongoing risk factors

NICE NG249 1.3.16: at discharge, consider referring the person to community services so that risk factors identified in hospital and still relevant at home can be addressed, for example through exercise programmes and home hazard assessment.

Source: NICE NG249 Falls: assessment and prevention (2025), 1.3.16

18. A At least daily, with feedback to the lead professional

NICE NG31 1.6.6: once anticipatory medicines are administered, monitor for benefits and any side effects at least daily, give feedback to the lead healthcare professional, and adjust the individualised care plan and prescription as necessary. Before each is given, 1.6.5 asks for a review of the person's current symptoms rather than automatic use.

Source: NICE NG31 Care of dying adults in the last days of life (2015), 1.6.5 to 1.6.6

19. D Type 2 diabetes, COPD, asthma and cardiovascular disease

HSE Chronic Disease Management Treatment Programme covers type 2 diabetes, COPD, asthma and cardiovascular disease (heart failure, atrial fibrillation, ischaemic heart disease and stroke or TIA) for eligible patients in general practice.

Source: HSE: GP chronic disease programme makes a difference for 400,000 people (2025)

20. C Calling an urgent response on the basis of clinician concern

INEWS V2 Recommendations 1, 6 and 25 emphasise clinical judgement: an urgent response can be called for low scores when there is concern. The chart is an adjunct to, not a replacement for, the nurse's assessment.

Source: NCG No. 1 INEWS V2 summary (2020), Recommendations 1 and 25

21. D Confirm the surgery, mark the site, check vital signs, sign consent

MedlinePlus, the day of your surgery: you confirm the location and type of surgery, the site is marked with a special marker, blood pressure, heart rate and breathing are checked, and you sign admission and consent forms. Bloods and premedication may also happen, but the confirmation, marking and forms are the checklist items MedlinePlus names.

Source: MedlinePlus: The day of your surgery

22. A Assessment, Diagnosis, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation

Nurse Theory: the five stages form a structured framework used to assess patients, identify problems, develop care plans and evaluate outcomes. Each stage builds on the one before, and the cycle repeats as the patient's condition changes.

Source: Nurse Theory: ADPIE, the five stages of the nursing process

23. D It lives harmlessly in the gut and causes infection when it spreads elsewhere, often in hospital via hands, catheters or ventilators

Healthline (on the RCSI reading list): K. pneumoniae is a Gram-negative bacterium that normally lives in the intestines and faeces and is harmless there; if it spreads to the lungs, blood, urinary tract, wounds or meninges it causes severe infection. It spreads by person-to-person contact with contaminated hands and through equipment such as ventilators and IV or urinary catheters, not through the air. Many strains are resistant to antibiotics.

Source: Healthline: What you need to know about a Klebsiella pneumoniae infection

24. D Ten

The 10 rights: right patient, reason, medication, route, time, dose, form, action, documentation and response. Many overseas curricula teach five or six; the RCSI test follows the NMBI list.

Source: NMBI Guidance on Medication Administration (2020), guiding principle 4

25. A Surgical aseptic technique with maximum sterile barrier precautions

HSE AMRIC 2026: standard aseptic technique (typically non-sterile gloves) is used for PVC insertion, accessing devices and dressing changes. Surgical aseptic technique, with a critical aseptic field, sterile gloves and maximum sterile barrier precautions (mask, cap, sterile gown, full body drape), is required for midline and CVAD insertion.

Source: HSE AMRIC, Prevention of Intravascular Catheter Related Infections (V2.0, June 2026), Aseptic technique

26. B Proceed without consent to save life

HSE consent policy: in a serious emergency where the person cannot consent, the necessary intervention may proceed without consent to save life or prevent serious harm, unless a valid and applicable advance healthcare directive refuses it. Relatives cannot consent on an adult's behalf.

Source: HSE National Consent Policy (2024), Part One, section 2.5

27. C Obtain the patient's consent first and document it

NMBI Code Principle 1 (confidentiality): information about a competent patient is shared with family only with the patient's consent, which should be documented. Next of kin status confers no automatic right to information.

Source: NMBI Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics (2025), Principle 4, standard 8

28. B Meals for people who cannot prepare them, usually by referral

Citizens Information: meals services (meals-on-wheels) are provided by voluntary and statutory bodies for people who cannot prepare meals, generally by referral, sometimes with a contribution towards cost.

Source: Citizens Information: Community care services

29. C Specific: focused on behaviours, not personalities, with suggestions

NMBI QCLE: good feedback is specific, focused on behaviours not personalities or subjective data, and includes suggestions for development. Calling a student careless labels the person. Better: 'You did not check the wristband before giving the tablets; check name and date of birth every time.'

Source: NMBI: Quality Clinical Learning Environment, good feedback

30. C Raises blood glucose by releasing stored glucose, secreted when glucose falls

OpenStax 17.9: receptors in the pancreas sense falling glucose during fasting, exercise or prolonged labour, and the alpha cells secrete glucagon, which prompts the liver to break down glycogen and make new glucose. Insulin is its opposite. Injectable glucagon is the rescue drug for a hypoglycaemic patient who cannot swallow.

Source: OpenStax Anatomy and Physiology 2e, 17.9 The endocrine pancreas