

A 38 year old successful businesswoman is admitted to the hospital with a right lower lobe pneumonia. Findings on chest X-ray also show old rib fractures on the left chest wall. It is most important to ask about which of the following

- a) Vitamin D and calcium intake
- b) Life stressors
- c) History of cancer
- d) Trauma history
- e) Alcohol use**

The important point to take home is you have a young woman with a **lower lobe pneumonia**. If she was recovering from the flu or another weakening illness this could be a simple explanation. The trick here is the **old rib fractures**. This could imply **balance problems**, such as with alcohol abuse. **Right lower lobe** also correlates well with **aspiration pneumonia** which is also **seen in alcoholics**. Just because she appears successful does not mean she cannot have drug problems.

b) Life stressors, could be important. If she is **depressed, she may have ingested something to take her own life and vomited**. The **old fractures point away from this** in some way. She could have an **abusive partner, but there would likely be other injuries of various ages** found on her body. None were mentioned here.

The cancer history, c), could be possible. Apart from vomiting causing aspiration from the chemotherapy, **metastasis can cause predisposition to fractures**. They are more common in other bone structures and a 38 year old is young to have cancer.

A history of **trauma**, d), would **explain the old fractures but not the pneumonia**. If there were findings **suggestive of lung trauma, patchy opacities** instead of pneumonia, then this would be more likely.

Please remember these questions are intended to help retain the knowledge required to pass the exam and not necessarily to simulate the exam questions to 100% detail. This case is modified from a case in "How Doctors Think" by Jerome Groopman, MD.