



50 Socratic Questions to Build Clinical Judgment

Pull from this bank mid-shift to prompt critical thinking — instead of just handing over the answer.

HOW TO USE THIS: These aren't a quiz. Ask one, then wait. Silence is fine — it means they're thinking. Pick questions that match the moment, not the whole list at once.

Prioritization & Triage

1. What's your priority right now, and why?
2. If you could only do one thing in the next five minutes, what would it be?
3. Which of your patients concerns you most right now, and what's driving that?
4. What would happen if you delayed this task by 30 minutes?
5. How did you decide what order to see your patients in?
6. What's the worst thing that could happen if we don't act on this right now?
7. What's pulling your attention right now, and is it the right thing?
8. If you had to hand off to another nurse in the next two minutes, what would you tell them first?
9. What's the most time-sensitive thing on your list?
10. How would your priorities change if this patient's status changed suddenly?

Assessment & Pattern Recognition

11. What are you seeing that concerns you?
12. How does this compare to what you'd expect for this diagnosis?
13. What does this trend over the last few hours tell you?
14. What's different about this patient today compared to yesterday?
15. What would you expect to see if this were [complication]?
16. What's your gut telling you, and what data backs that up?
17. If a more experienced nurse walked in right now, what do you think they'd notice first?
18. What's normal here, and what's not?
19. How confident are you in this assessment, and why?
20. What additional information would change your mind?

Anticipating Change

21. What do you expect to happen in the next hour?
22. What would you do if this got worse before we can get help?
23. What's your backup plan if [intervention] doesn't work?
24. What are you watching for that would tell you this is trending the wrong direction?
25. If this patient crashed right now, what would you do first?
26. What's the earliest sign that this could go wrong?
27. How will you know if the treatment is working?
28. What questions do you still have that we haven't answered?
29. What would make you call the provider right now versus waiting?

30. What's your plan if the family asks a question you don't know the answer to?

Medication & Safety

31. Why is this patient on this medication?

32. What would you check before giving this?

33. What's the maximum safe dose here, and how do you know?

34. What would make you hold this medication?

35. What are the key side effects you'd watch for after giving this?

36. How does this medication interact with what else this patient is taking?

37. What's your process for double-checking a high-alert medication?

38. If you weren't sure about a dose, what would you do?

39. What would you tell this patient about this medication if they asked?

40. What's the rationale behind this order?

Communication & Escalation

41. How would you explain this situation to the family?

42. If you called the provider right now, what would you say in the first sentence?

43. What information does the next shift absolutely need to know?

44. How would you ask for help if you weren't sure this was an emergency yet?

45. What's the SBAR for this patient right now?

Reflection & Debrief

46. What went well today, and why do you think it worked?

47. What would you do differently if you could redo this shift?

48. What's one thing you learned today that surprised you?

49. What's still confusing, and what would help you understand it better?

50. What's one question you're afraid to ask, and why?