

Communication among Physicians and Allied Healthcare Associates: The Role and Rank of Medical Terminology in Surgery, Public Health, and the History of Medicine

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Introduction

The Etymology of Specialized Language

Throughout modern history, there has been increased use of individual and unit-specific terms that have ultimately led to a wide range of terminology that describes the same area [1]. Therefore, there has emerged a need for standardized medical terminology. As in all languages, terms used are for effective communication. The language of medicine is no different in that regard. No matter what culture or country, medical terminology facilitates communication and understanding. It is applicable the world over within the field of medicine, and is especially important in critical specialties, such as general surgery. It is the standardized means of communication that enables different medical professionals to communicate efficiently and effectively [2]. Medical terminology is not limited to an individual or a small group, but incorporates a wide range of professions: doctors, nurses, administrators, medical coders, technicians, assistants, and ancillary personnel; and includes other industries like pharmacology, medical research, and insurance. Medical terminology allows diverse people with different levels of learning and different native languages and cultures to communicate within the vast "healthcare universe".

Discussion

The Use and Utilization of Medical Terminology

In the practical sense, medical terminology is used daily, moment-by-moment, to describe the kind of condition a patient has and the type of treatment they require. The communicate may be from a doctor from one section of a hospital to another practitioner in another section of that same hospital without needing to provide a lengthy explanation or make a personal visit; or, it may be from one part of the world to another. Medical terminology is meant to make understanding a patient's condition straightforward and accurate. Without mastery of medical terminology, there is likely to be miscommunication and misunderstanding resulting in severe consequences including the unnecessary loss of life.

Medical terminology is also utilized for easier documentation and speedier communication between provider and insurance representative. It offers abbreviations and universal terms and symbols that enable medical personnel to pass essential messages in fewer words. Without it, statements would be longer and more time-consuming to write. The use of medical terminology eases the work of the doctors, nurses, and staff since they are required to write numerous documents daily concerning each patient. Thus, medical terminology enables all involved to communicate clearly with less effort and in less time. Also, understanding the morphology of medical terms (roots, prefixes, suffixes, and combining and structure) aids in the understanding of what is written or said. In other words, a medical term can be broken down into roots, prefixes, and suffixes to decipher what is being discussed. Ultimately, medical terminology results in better patient care and improved outcomes.

What may seem foreign, impractical or intimidating to the layperson is quite meaningful to the healthcare practitioner or medical researcher. Healthcare professionals use medical terminology to describe situations that would be difficult to explain in ordinary language. It also provides a level of security and safety with the benefit of concealing personal and private patient information from those who do not have the permission or the right to know such confidential information.

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Shortens the Learning Curve

Medical terminology shortens the learning curve of the human body and the diagnosis and treatment thereof. Although medicine is a complex and vast field, medical terminology has expertly played a role in streamlining and simplifying the learning process. Learners master complex skills in much less time than it would take under circumstances lacking a succinct and universal terminology. Medical terminology aids in shortening the time one needs to grasp a given concept. It makes learners understand much more information at the initial level and primary stages of learning and, therefore, reduces the time required to revisit procedures and processes. Because of medicine's complicated nature, the field of medicine, without medical terminology, would require much more time and devotion to study and master. Medical terminology shortens the time required to write or read procedures. It also acts as a precise way of giving instructions. Learners are, therefore, able to gain proficiency at a faster rate [5]. The introduction of various teaching models regarding medical terminology has aided in shortening the learning curve. These models have facilitated the acquisition of procedures and skills that would otherwise take more time to study. The models have provided a less costly, more intelligible, and applicable approach to medicine [4].

Facilitates Testing and Evaluation

Evaluation (testing) becomes easier since an examination looks for specific terms and wording rather than considering long phrases. Medical terminology lowers the complication rate and the perception that the field of medicine involves too much or is overwhelming.

Reduces Risk in Surgery

Shortening of the learning curve has been of great help in the field of medicine. Also, medical terminology reduces potential risks to patients during the learning phase for surgeons [1].

Conclusion

The importance of fluency in medical terminology cannot be overstated. Standardized medical terminology (with its advantages in better communication, improved patient care, increased visibility of medical interventions, higher adherence to standards of care, enhanced data collection to evaluate medical care outcomes, and facilitated assessment of medical competence) offers a more advantageous approach to medicine [3]. Medical terminology is a universal language that is readily understandable by all healthcare practitioners to describe the processes and procedures they perform on a daily basis in their professions [4]. According to the United States & NASA Scientific and Technical Information Facility, "[medical terminology] primarily provides a standard means of communication" [5].

Medical terminology improves medical communications universally, provides security and confidentiality, improves all aspects of patient care, enhances education and shortens the learning curve for surgeons, streamlines educational processing and evaluation, and ultimately helps save countless lives. With all of this in mind, medical terminology could be considered one of the most significant contributions ever to the specialty of surgery and the field of public health.

Future Research

However beneficial medical terminology has been to patient care, limitations and new challenges can now be seen. The healthcare system will need to introduce a standardized database where information technology would be employed to achieve an efficient way of sharing information between different practitioners. The standardized database should include different laboratory tests and the results obtained. Such a database may well emulate the utility of the Logical Observation Identifier Names and Codes (LOINC) database [2].

Appraisal and Acknowledgment

Without medical terminology, the system of medicine today would likely be a shadow of itself or cease to be. Medical terminology must continue to evolve so that medical terminology can continue to lead in the evolution of medicine. In its use every day in nearly every moment, the significance of medical terminology may be overlooked or taken for granted. With all of the advantages that it provides, medical terminology could rightfully be considered the greatest contributions ever in the history of medicine.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this paper was written in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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