



Webscout:

The secret world of medical slang

by Joeyn Flauaus

All professions develop a secret language that is incomprehensible to outsiders. So it is no surprise that doctors, nurses, medical staff, and non-medical hospital staff have created their own vocabulary that is almost universally understood. The so-called medical slang is used widespread but you won't find it in any medical texts, journals, or dictionaries. Medical slang is using acronyms and terms as a code to describe mystifying medical conditions as well as personalities and behaviours of patients. It is a way to cope with stressful and overwhelming situations.

Examples of Medical Slang:

Double- O Doc - A doc with a license to kill. Basically means a very stupid doctor.

GOK - God only knows - a reference to a doctor's bewilderment at a particular set of symptoms presented by a patient.

HT - He's Toast. A person with very poor prognosis.

LOBNH - Lights on But Nobody Home.

TEETH - Tried Everything Else, Try Homeopathy.

UBI - Unexplained Beer Injury (British emergency-room acronym).

Most of the medical slang terms found in the Internet are from the UK and the US. However, medical slang is used worldwide and can be found in numerous languages.

Although medical slang may serve to vent frustration it also takes the focus off the patients deserving empathy. Most of the terms would offend patients if they knew what the terms meant. In general, the use of medical slang is declining as medical slang is nowadays considered unethical and unacceptable. In addition, there is the risk of being sued by patients if they find an offensive medical slang term on their patient record.

I have put together a selection of literature and websites on medical slang to provide you with more insights about the topic.

Medical slang in British hospitals

Dr Adam Fox, a paediatric allergist in the UK, has published an exhaustive dictionary of medical slang in *Ethics & Behaviour* [1]. In the article he is discussing the usage, psychological, ethical, and legal aspects of medical slang.

"The House of God"

The book, *The House of God* [2], a novel of life and death

in an American hospital, describes the circumstances that lead to the evolvment of medical slang in order to deal with difficult and stressful situations. With this novel, the author introduced the most famous of all medical acronyms "GOMER" (Get Out Of My Emergency Room). The term describes a patient heading towards a death that aggressive medical care may only make more painful.

<http://www.messybeast.com/dragonqueen/medical-acronyms.htm>

This website provides a comprehensive glossary of doctor's slang, medical slang and acronyms as well as veterinary acronyms & slang.

http://www2.warnerbros.com/ertv/medical_gloss.html

This website provides a short list of medical terms and slang straight from the popular TV show ER (Emergency Room).

If you find a web site that should be mentioned in the next issue, or if you have any other comments or suggestions, please email me at: Joeyn.Flauaus@sanofi-aventis.com.

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2. Samuel Shem "The House of God" - Dell Publishing; 1st edition (1979)

