

Too much ‘Google’— Kinderwunschsprechstunde

by Alistair Reeves

For professional purposes, I generally spend about 10 hours per day at the PC or looking at paper. Sometimes I have to do longer hours and it is tough, because I have been lazy and gone off to the shops or indulged myself in some other way, and have to catch up. Whatever, I look at a computer screen almost all day, almost every day, and if I want a quick piece of information or an answer to a question, nothing seems easier than to look on Google. The answer is there somewhere—not always straightaway—but if you get your head down and refine your search, you usually find something helpful. I also have shelves full of books, of course, but I am using them decreasingly.

Once upon a time we had books and telephones and no Internet, and this is not very long ago. Some of you—like me—will remember the advent of the electric typewriter with a very small memory—and we are not *that* old. However, I have never been a great ‘telephoner’, so Google and other search engines seem made for me. But one day this year, after a frustrating Google search, I decided to telephone a few fellow EMWA members, with an amazing result.

I was working on a website dealing with a delicate subject: the surgical creation of a neovagina in women who have been unfortunate enough to be born without a vagina (this is not as uncommon as you may think: about 1 in 5,000 new births in Europe!). The syndromes responsible for this (the most common is Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser syndrome) also mean that the women concerned cannot have children because they usually also have only a rudimentary uterus, despite normally functional ovaries. If these women wish to have children, they can do so by adopting, of course, or by using surrogate mothers, if a country’s legislation permits this. The website concerned directed the women with this disorder to the ‘Kinderwunschsprechstunde’ at the university hospital concerned in Germany. Part of my task in writing the text for the website was to find a reasonable English expression for ‘Kinderwunschsprechstunde’ (literally: ‘Desire-for-children clinic’). Speakers of German will be familiar with the problems with ‘Kinderwunsch’: finding adequate English for ‘mit dringendem Kinderwunsch’ (literally: ‘with urgent desire-for-children’) is not easy, but it sounds perfectly normal in German.

I rang several colleagues throughout Europe. If they didn’t speak German, I explained the problem, and left messages with quite a few. OK: I had nothing in the screen straight

away, but over the next 2 or 3 days, I had calls and messages from all of them with all sorts of suggestions, from their own experience, websites to look at, and, from all, the promise that they’d be in touch again if anything else occurred to them. And indeed, several did get in touch again more than once with helpful suggestions—and a couple even asked me months later at the conference in Lyon if I had found anything suitable.

I also learned quite a bit on the way: for example, the nuances behind the term ‘parenting’, that ‘infertility’, unlike the German ‘Unfruchtbarkeit’, is quite acceptable in English in this context, and that family planning ‘sounds very 50s or 60s’ and would be understood to mean only ‘contraception’. ‘Parenting’ is interesting: I liked ‘Parenting Clinic’, because there was no idea of ‘fertility’ or ‘infertility’ in the name and the women and their partners cannot even be helped by IVF (so ‘infertility’ sounded a bit inappropriate: surgery is possible, so they can enjoy sexual intercourse, but pregnancy is not possible). But I learned that ‘parenting’, in the UK at least, is used to refer to the upbringing of children and the long-term process of ‘being a parent’, and not just the act of having a child.

So, not only had I received a huge amount of help with my problem, I had also actually been in contact with people rather than a machine. Those of you working for companies with daily contact with a team may feel differently about this. Those of us sitting alone can forget about the people factor, and rely all too often on only electronic help.

The only problem was, we didn’t find a term we were 100% happy with—and after much deliberation finally settled on simple ‘Infertility Clinic’, because it is in common use in the UK. It doesn’t reflect the ‘desire-for-children’ terminology, but these clinics perform the same function. That is sometimes how it is between different languages, there just isn’t a direct equivalent. It’s not too late to change, however: if anyone has any suggestions, please let me know!

Alistair Reeves

*Ascribe Medical Writing and Translation,
Wiesbaden, Germany
a.reeves@ascribe.de
<http://www.ascribe.de>*