LATIN AND GREEK IN ENGLISN MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

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Medical terminology is a vocabulary for accurately describing the human body and associated components, conditions, processes and process in a science-based manner. It is to be used in the medical and nursing fields. This systematic approach to word building and term comprehension is based on the concept of: Word roots, prefixes, and suffixes. The word root is a term derived from a source language such as Greek or Latin and usually describes a body part. The prefix can be added in front of the term to modify the word root by giving additional information about the location of an organ, the number of parts, or time involved. Suffixes are attached to the end of a word root to add meaning such as condition, disease process, or   procedure.

In the process of creating medical terminology, certain rules of language apply. These rules are part of language mechanics called linguistics. So, when a term is developed, some logical process is applied. When in doubt, the result should be verified by a medical terminology dictionary. The process of learning a new language, such as medical terminology, is a challenging, yet attainable goal as the basic rules once learned make the process easier.

Decoding the medical term is an important process. One approach involves breaking down the word by evaluating the meaning of the suffix first, then prefix, and finally the word root. This will generally produce a good result for the experienced health care professional.

In forming or understanding a word root, one needs a basic comprehension of the term and the source language. The study of the origin of words is called etymology. For example, if a word was to be formed to indicate a condition of kidneys, there are two primary roots – one from Greek (*nefr(os)*) and one from Latin (*ren(es)*). Renal failure would be a condition of kidneys, and nephritis is also a condition, or inflammation, of the kidneys. The suffix *-itis* means inflammation, and the entire word conveys the meaning inflammation of the kidney. To continue using these terms, other combinations will be presented for the purpose of examples: The term '*suprarenal* is a combination of the prefix *supra-* (meaning "above"), and the word root for kidney, and the entire word means "situated above the kidneys". The word "nephrologist" combines the root word for kidney to the suffix *-ologist* with the resultant meaning of "one who studies the kidneys".

In medical terminology, the word root is not usually capable of standing alone as a complete word within a sentence. This is different than most word roots in modern standard English. The medical word root is taken from a different source language, so it will remain meaningless as a stand-alone term in an English sentence. A suffix or prefix must be added to make a usable medical term. For example the term for "concerning the heart" is "cardiacus", from the Greek *kardía*. If a person is suffering from a heart related illness, the statement, "The patient suffered a *kardía* event," would not make sense. However, with the addition of a suffix "ac", the statement would be modified to read, "The patient suffered a cardiac event" which is an acceptable use of medical terminology. The process is different in standard English because the word roots are capable of standing alone in a sentence. For example, the word eye is a word root in English that can be used without modification in a sentence.

An additional challenge to the student of medical terminology is that the formation of the plural of a word must be done using the rules of forming the proper plural form as used in the source language. This is more difficult than in English, where adding "s" or "es" is the rule. Greek and Latin each have different rules to be applied when forming the plural form of the word root. Often such details can be found using a medical dictionary.

There is also another rule of medical terminology to be recognized by the student. When more than one body part is used in the formation of a medical term, the individual word roots are joined together by using the combining form using the letter *-o-* to indicate the joining together of various body parts. For example if there is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines, this would be written as *gastro* and *enter* plus *itis*, gastroenteritis. In this example, the *-o-* signifies the joining together of two body
parts.

Medical Terminology often uses words created using prefixes and suffixes in Latin and Ancient Greek. In medicine, their meanings, and their etymology, are informed by the language of origin. Prefixes and suffixes, primarily in Greek -- but also in Latin, have a dropable -o-. Medical roots generally go together according to language: Greek prefixes go with Greek suffixes and Latin Prefixes with Latin Suffixes. Although it is technically considered acceptable to create hybrid words, it is strongly preferred not to mix different lingual roots.

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