

## LATIN AS THE LANGUAGE OF MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

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The branches of science in which Latin has traditionally found its application involve indisputably medicine. The present paper offers an up-to-date view of the status of Latin as the language of medicine, namely in its terminological component. It is concerned in greater detail with the three basic terminological vocabularies in which a doctor cannot so far manage without its knowledge: anatomical, clinical and pharmaceutical. This is a brief survey, on the three most important corpuses of terminology and on the role which Latin plays in them at present.

A primary rank is occupied by anatomical nomenclature whose international version remains Latin in the full extent. All of the anatomical nomenclatures produced so far have used Latin as their base. When taking a cursory glance at the English anatomical nomenclature, one is likely to note that there is Latin present not only in the nominative plural of some of the nouns, e.g.: fascia – fasciae, sulcus – sulci, phenomenon – phenomena, datum – data, encephalon – encephala, but that there also occur nominative plurals of some adjectives, e.g.: chordae tendineae, foramina nervosa, rami communicantes.

A substantially more complicated image is provided by the terminology of the clinical disciplines. It is comprehensible because, first, its range is much larger (up to 60 thousand terms according to some estimates) and, second, there is a difference between the descriptive disciplines such as anatomy and histology on the one hand, and clinical medicine, which undergoes far more serious upheavals, on the other.

Some terms of Greek - Latin origin are presented in an English variation, i.e. mainly with Anglicized suffixes, e.g.: peptic ulcer, thromboembolic pulmonary hypertension, acute viral gastroenteropathy. Others are used by the English professional terminology in their original Latin wordings (naturally with an English pronunciation), e.g.: salpingitis, nephrolithiasis, colitis. But it becomes clear that the English medical terminology can't at all be reasonably mastered without the knowledge of basic Latin.

The causes of some diseases have namely been unknown as yet, and there even appear new diseases whose names are later subject to the development of opinions on their origin, therapy, and the like. But the roots and the stems that are used for the formation of the clinical terms remain Latin.

Clinical terms as well as terms relating to pathological anatomy may be encountered in medical literature, in the doctor's current practice when writing out case records, in diagnoses relating to pathological anatomy, and in normative handbooks of medical terminology. As far as the use of Latin terms is concerned, apart from some new expressions coming from English, they are still widely used for creating new words.

A third area where Latin has been traditionally preserved is represented by pharmaceutical and pharmacological terminology. In pharmaceutical terminology Latin has, for the time being, remained a functioning means of international communication, guaranteed by the European Pharmacopoeia (1996) and by the corpus of International Non-proprietary Names (1992, 1996).

Even though national languages have been favored in dispensing prescriptions in some of the countries of the European Union, in the central European area Latin has continued to be preferred and the standard international nomenclature of drugs and auxiliary substances has generally been based on the Latin version. The Latin version of the pharmacopoeia has, among other countries, been used in Germany, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, the countries of the former Soviet Union and, which is especially remarkable, also in Japan and China.

Apart from this, Latin and Greek constitute a unique stock which may also be drawn upon in case of the need of creating a new term. The incomprehensibility of the two languages for the patient is a specific moment of preference, as it is not always in his or her interest to understand the utterances of physicians. Thus the doctor speaks an incomprehensible language and, through a reversed logical process, the impression may arise that if somebody uses an incomprehensible terminology, she or he is a good doctor. We might designate this phenomenon as the mystery of the foreign-language medical communication.

Medical staff needs to know Greek - Latin terms to understand medical documentation properly and for the communications between professional medical people. If you are familiar with the Latin roots, you can 'translate' the medical terminology and medical professional texts into English.

As follows from the preceding exposition, Latin has been so deep-rooted in medical terminology and thus also in medicine, and at the same time constantly so productive that its presence in it appears as a natural matter of course (though there do exist certain geographical variations in the individual areas).

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