

Medical mispronunciations

DOCTORS ARE OFTEN CRITICISED for failing to communicate adequately with their patients and for using medical jargon. But what about “patient speak” — those words that are nearly what we thought we meant? This collection of medical mispronunciations has been carefully recorded in a notebook (yes, one from a pharmaceutical company) kept in the top drawer of a suburban general practitioner's desk, and edited over dinner by the medical members of the family: we share them with you for the festive season.

The **obituary gland** seems a sad place to start. Moving down the **ophagus** tube, past the **broccoli**, a **fundoapplication** may help. You may recognise the **psychiatric nerve**, but what about the **haricot veins**? The **introverted uterus** is a little shy, but the **crucial ligaments** are obviously important. **Platinums** and **playtex** are everywhere. (*Pituitary gland, oesophagus, bronchi, fundoplication, sciatic nerve, varicose veins, retroverted uterus, cruciate ligaments, platelets.*)

Having sorted out the anatomy, the various ailments are next. There are many **inflations** in the vocabulary. Does the **human Pavarotti virus** affect the vocal chords? What organs are involved with a **hippopotamus** or a **helicopter**? (*Inflamations, human papillomavirus, hypothalamus, helicobacter.*)

For the surgeons, we need help with the **biblical hernias** and **erupted spleen**. It may be a little more difficult to decide which specialist to refer a **fractured zygote**, a **utopic pregnancy**, **bunyips**, painful **anodes** and the occasional **Arnold Curarie**. (*Umbilical hernias, ruptured spleen, fractured zygoma, ectopic pregnancy, bunions, nodes, Arnold Chiari malformation.*)

We could probably send the **pigsty**, **cellutosis**, **cradle crop**, **scarytosis**, and **ectopic eczema** to the dermatologists (if they are not at a conference in **Barcelona** or **Melanesia**), but who treats **septic ulcers**? (*Stye, cellulitis, cradle cap, solar keratosis, atopic eczema, basal cell carcinoma, melanoma, peptic ulcers.*)

The respiratory physicians, with their **stereophone** can move from **sleep apathy** to **bronchial ecstasy**, but should **postnatal drips** and **reproductive coughs** go to them or the obstetricians? Even more confusing are **Alka Seltzer's** disease, **tetanus** and **tendonitis**, which are not what they seem. The physicians could investigate **grout**, **osteoferocious** and **facetious anaemia** and handle a **myocardial infraction**. And for the lawyers — is needless **dysplastic syndrome** considered as **incompetence** or a **minuscule tear**? (*Stethoscope, sleep apnoea, bronchiectasis, postnasal drip, productive cough, Alzheimer's disease, tinnitus, gout, osteoporosis, pernicious anaemia, myocardial infarction, dysplastic naevus, incontinence, meniscal tear.*)

Then there are the things that doctors do to patients which make one wonder about informed consent. If you **seduced** the patient into **pornography** what would you expect? A **tubal litigation** may follow, or perhaps swifter justice with a **lumbar punch**. **Monograms** and **egg, lettuce and fried tomatoes** are common investigations, but who wants the **Geiger counter** or **MI5**? If the patient asked for the **locum**,

or, worse still, for the results of their own **autopsy**, how would you respond? They may be better going to the **physioterrorist**, or just to the **choir practice**. (*Induced, colostomy, tubal ligation, lumbar puncture, mammogram, E/LFT's, glucometer, MRI, local anaesthetic, biopsy, physiotherapist, chiropractor.*)

But the best mispronunciations of all are the muddled medications. The **metropolis** tablets are real **blocker beaters**, and others prefer the **condominium** lifestyle, but on a bad day it may be necessary to retreat to **Nimbin** for a bit of peace and quiet. We could go there in the **Valiant**, filling up with **Caltex** on the way, but hopefully avoiding an **argument** when the map reading leads us astray. (*Metoprolol, beta blockers, Coumadin, Nemdyn ointment, Valium, Caltrate, Augmentin.*)

The medical profession has all sorts of alternative remedies, for **Anzacs** and **aristocrats** and perhaps even the odd **pes-sowary**. These include **marzipan**, **genetic** tablets and those well-known **urinal** tablets, and **Laminex**, but there is less demand for the **repulsive** tablets. (*Zantac, Aristocort, pessary, temazepam, generic, Ural, Lasix, Prepulsid.*)

In our spare time we could join the local music scene with a **microphone**, or go on a picnic with the **transistor patch** and the **Mortein**, taking **Ventolin noodles** and **Caviar** tablets for lunch. Or we could take up walking and ease the aches and pains afterwards with **Catacomb** ointment, **Denturub** or **Aquarius** cream. At the opposite ends of the spectrum are the **libido** and the **celibacy** tablets. Taken along with some **clandestine erotics**, who knows what **galactic splendour** may result? (*Micropore, Transiderm patch, morphine, Ventolin nebules, Karvea, Kenacomb, Dencorub, aqueous cream, placebo, Celebrex, Canesten, Aurorix, Largactil, Plendil.*)

On that note, now that you are completely confused by trying to be **bilingual**, get out the **Kleenex**, sit back and hope it all goes into **remittance**. (*Nitrolingual, Keflex, remission.*)

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