

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Outdated Medical Terminology

A guide for medical students, educators and providers



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The impact of language

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An important piece to understanding inequities and adequately addressing them is critically analyzing the language and concepts we use every day communicating with our patients, with each other, through our medical documentation, and through our research.

Language is continuously evolving and this table is by no means a perfect or comprehensive list, however, we hope that it serves as a resource to critically think about the language we use and propagate, and how we might make conscious efforts to move towards inclusivity.

Respectful & identity-affirming language puts our humanity at the center.

Inclusive language allows everyone to feel recognized, valued, invited and motivated to contribute at their highest level.

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Eponyms

An eponym is a person, a place, or a thing after whom or which someone or something is, or is believed to be, named.

We acknowledge the effort to transition away from eponyms, however from our literature review, there are currently no alternatives for Hansen's disease.

OUTDATED TERM	WHY IS IT HARMFUL?	ALTERNATIVE TERM
Buffalo Hump	Derogatory towards overweight individuals.	Supraclavicular and/or dorsocervical fat pad
Mongolian Spot	Historically, individuals with these skin findings were stigmatized to be racially inferior; term originated with the incorrect belief that it was most common in Mongolian populations (1,2).	Slate grey nevus, congenital dermal melanosis

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OUTDATED TERM	WHY IS IT HARMFUL?	ALTERNATIVE TERM
Dwarfism	Linked to the root meaning 'to deceive,' implying an inherent moral defect in individuals with short stature (3). Also, historically been linked to intellectual disability which is inaccurate.	Individual with short stature, little person
Cretinism	Derogatory slang term for someone perceived as foolish or incompetent; historically used to mean "human being" as a reminder that individuals with this condition were humans and not beasts (3,5).	Congenital iodine deficiency syndrome, congenital hypothyroidism
Mental Retardation	Retardation is often used as a synonym for "dumb" or "stupid" and equates people with disabilities as such (6).	Individual with intellectual disability or developmental delay

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OUTDATED TERM	WHY IS IT HARMFUL?	ALTERNATIVE TERM
Substance abuse (abuser)	Stigmatizing because it reduces an individual's identity to their struggle with substance (alcohol, tobacco, recreational drug, or other substance) use; denies dignity (8).	Individual with substance use disorder, individual who suffers from addiction
Leprosy	Historically used as a metaphor for "all that is impure, immoral, and dreadful" (9).	Hansen's Disease
Moon face or facies	Slur used for Asians and Pacific Islanders (10).	Swelling or puffing of face

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OUTDATED TERM	WHY IS IT HARMFUL?	ALTERNATIVE TERM
Red man syndrome	Slur used for Indigenous people (11, 12).	Vancomycin-flushing Syndrome
Wegener's Granulomatosis	Named after a member of the Nazi party (13).	Granulomatosis with Polyangiitis
Reiter's arthritis	Named after a member of the Nazi party (14).	Reactive Arthritis
Asperger's Syndrome	Named after a member of the Nazi party (15).	Autism Spectrum Disorder
Cushing's Disease or Syndrome	Named after an anti-Semitic and racist individual who supported the atrocities of the Nazi party towards Jewish individuals (16).	Hypercortisolism

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