

ACRONYMS OF AILMENT

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Profanity, obscenity and violence are slipping into medical terminology and phraseology unobtrusively through the back door of the acronymal abbreviation. When quoted as an acronym, coronary artery disease becomes an insulting CAD, secondary carcinoma of the upper mediastinum turns into SCUM, thyroid uptake gradient transforms into THUG, and right atrial pressure elevation transmutes into RAPE. Medical papers abound in such vulgarisms as GIP (gonorrhoeal invasive peritonitis), HOG (hepatic output of glucose), IMP (idiopathic myeloid proliferation) and HOOD (hyperbaric oxygen ongoing delivery).

Even if not downright offensive, some acronyms can provoke depression by unpleasant association. TAX (tubular ascending xanthomatosis), POX (peri-orbital xanthelasma), DUMP (diffuse uncontrolled monotonal peristalsis) and other abbreviations of similar ilk are hardly conducive to good cheer. Nor do politically tainted acronyms such as RED (rapid erythrocyte disintegration) and PINKO (papillomatous invasive keratosis oculi) inspire confidence.

Not all, of course, is in bad taste in the acronymic ambit. There are sweet words like PIE which stands for pulmonary infiltration with eosinophils, friendly words like AMI which represents acute myocardial infarction, or PAL which epitomizes pyogenic abscess of the liver. ALAS (amino levulose acid synthetase), they are the exception rather than the rule.