

Misnomers in Hand Surgery

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Abstract

Hand surgery literature is full of disease names and terms. Some of them are misnomers, which are misleading to physicians outside the specialty. Therefore, we decided to collect all misnomers and provide them via this paper. Considering development of sciences in future, perhaps avoidance from new misnomers is impossible, but awareness of this fact, lead us to be more ingenious in interpretation. On the other hand, we believe this collection would be interesting for most specialists in hand surgery and as well informative for others.

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Introduction

A “misnomer” is a word or term that suggests a meaning that is known to be wrong. Misnomers often arise because the thing named received its name long before its true nature was known. A misnomer may also be simply a word that is used incorrectly or misleadingly. “Misnomer” does not mean “misunderstanding” or “popular misconception.” In fact, the word misnomer when used to describe a behavioral mistake or a misperception of reality is itself a misnomer (1). In regard to this fact, there are misnomers in the field of hand surgery; therefore we tried to collect them together. In achieving this purpose, we searched PubMed database with “misnomer” as keyword. We performed similar work with “misnomer” in hand surgery as keyword in Google search engine as well. For more precise search, we looked for some common hand surgery textbooks that among them were Green’s operative hand surgery. It is interesting that the word “hand surgery” is one of the “misnomers” itself.

Results

We sort the words by alphabetical order, as following:

1. Acute gamekeeper’s thumb: Repetitive minor injury to the ulnar collateral ligament results in a chronic laxity known as “Gamekeeper’s thumb,” eponymously described in Scottish gamekeepers who would break the necks of rabbits between the thumb and index finger. The term “Acute gamekeeper’s

thumb” is therefore a misnomer because its a chronic process (2,3).

2. Bone bruise: The term bone bruise is a misnomer because makes the injury seem less serious than it is. What people mean by bone bruise is really an injury to tissue over a bone, not to the bone itself. A so-called bone bruise is actually a fracturing of the inner layer of bone (4).

3. Boxer’s fracture: Metacarpal neck fractures (Boxer’s fracture) are common and usually involve the ring and small metacarpals. “Boxer’s fracture” is really a misnomer. Fractures of the fifth metacarpal neck are rarely seen in professional boxers; they are far a more common in brawlers and in people who hit solid objects such as walls (5).

4. Congenital trigger thumb: The term “congenital” is probably a misnomer because widespread evaluations of newborns have failed to discover a trigger thumb and this problem presents over the time (5).

5. Extensor expansion of the finger: Extensor expansion refers to the entire assembly of extrinsic and intrinsic tendons and ligaments; it is a misnomer since the interossei flexes the MP joint not to extend it (6).

6. Funny bone: The “funny bone” is not a bone - the phrase refers to the nerve. The funny bone got its nickname because of funny feeling you get after you hit it (7).

7. Frozen shoulder: Frozen shoulder is something of a misnomer. The shoulder doesnot actually freeze. Instead patients cannot move it like they could before. Frozen shoulder is a joint problem, technically called

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adhesive capsulitis (8).

8. Ganglion cyst: Being a misnomer that has persisted into modern times (9). The ganglion cyst is unrelated to the neural “ganglion” or “ganglion cell;” its etymology traces back to the ancient Greek γάγγλιον, a “knot” or “swelling beneath the skin,” which extends to the neural masses by analogy. In general, Hippocrates is credited with the description of these cysts (10).

9. Hand therapy: Hand therapy is a bit of a misnomer, as hand therapists tend to treat injuries that involve the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulder (11).

10. Hand surgery: A hybrid science of orthopedic, plastic, micro and some neurosurgery, “hand surgery” is a misnomer as the discipline is not confined to the hand; “hand and upper limb surgery” is more accurate (12).

11. Herpetic Whitlow (herpes virus infection of finger): The term whitlow is believed to be a misnomer, because whitlow was generally used to describe a suppurative infection of the finger pulp, such as a felon. Other terms used to describe herpetic infection of the fingers include herpetic febrilis of the finger, herpetic paronychia, and aseptic felon (5).

12. Intraosseous ganglion: The term intraosseous ganglion is a misnomer because its a lytic process caused progressive destruction of the subchondral layers of the affected bone resulting in communication with the adjacent joint space. This intraosseous lesion probably caused by vascular disturbances from mechanical stress and repeated trauma and is better to be named intraosseous cysts (13).

13. Myositis ossificans: The term is a misnomer because myositis ossificans may not be confined to muscle, lacks bone in its early stage, and is devoid of significant inflammation (14).

14. Pyogenic granuloma: Pyogenic granuloma is considered a reactive hyperproliferative vascular response to trauma or other stimuli. The name “pyogenic granuloma” is a misnomer since the condition is not associated with pus and does not represent a granuloma histologically (15).

15. Radial head subluxation (Nursemaid’s elbow): Nursemaid’s elbows are indistinguishable from healthy elbows on the radiograph. Thus, the term “radial head subluxation” appears to be a misnomer and pathology is annular ligament subluxation (16).

16. Stenosing tenosynovitis of the first wrist extensor compartment: The term “stenosing tenosynovitis” is a misnomer and we believe that de Quervain’s disease is a result of intrinsic, degenerative mechanisms rather than extrinsic, inflammatory ones (17).

17. Tennis elbow: “Tennis elbow” is a condition that occurs frequently on the lateral condyle of the elbow. There are many causes for this condition, and it is generally accepted that tennis accounts for only 5% of these painful elbows (18).

Thumb duplication: Thumb duplication may be a

misnomer because it implies that there are two normal thumbs whereas, in fact, both thumbs are hypoplastic (19).

Discussion

Finally, it is worth nothing to say some names at a time to come misnomer, and further investigation has demonstrated that the original name is correct. For example, the word “princeps pollicis” artery for several years was considered a misnomer (20), but in recent years via more anatomical studies, the initial naming was approved (20). Therefore, you should always consider, judgments are changing and evolving; perhaps some current misnomers, would be correct in future.

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Misnomers in Hand Surgery

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