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## Updating the dermatologic nomenclature: names that are good or bad.

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# Editorial

## Updating the Dermatologic Nomenclature: Names that are good or bad

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Dermatology probably has the largest vocabulary of any of the medical specialties,<sup>1</sup> a statement to which we can attest when we reviewed aspects of the Dermatology Lexicon project. Some terms are derived from the Latin or Greek and present spelling problems to all but a select few. Examples include acrokeratosis verruciformis and pterigium. Other diseases carry names that are such a mouthful that few can call them out without the interruption of breathing. These might include erosio interdigitalis blastomycetica and dermatitis exudative discoid and lichenoid of Sulzberger and Garbe. No wonder the former is now referred to simply as candidosis, or is it, candidiasis, and the latter as oid-oid disease or Sulzberger-Garbe disease.

### Bad Names

Be that as it may, we would like to focus on disease names that we should consider avoiding, because they unnecessarily connote ideas that are not germane to patient welfare. These diseases can be easily called by other terms.

- Chondrodermatitis nodularis chronica helices - This may sound more important in its Latin form; simplifying the diagnosis to chondrodermatitis of the ear is much more understandable. The cartilage can still be inflamed, and the annoying pain and tenderness will exist with the simplified terminology.
- Senile keratoses – These represent the overproduction of keratin due to excessive exposure to sunlight. While it may take many years of such exposure, not every patient with this possible pre-malignant condition is approaching Alzheimer’s disease. Even knowing that the histopathology demonstrates squamous cell carcinoma, grade ½, use of the term – actinic keratosis – would be preferred.
- Senile purpura – While non-palpable purpura is often seen in older patients, there is no reason to cast aspersions on the chronologically challenged. Possibly, just calling the red collections, often found on the arms, non-palpable purpura would suffice. Chronic purpura just is not helpful.

### **Mediocre Names**

- Neurodermatitis denotes red scaling patches on the body, often with lichenification. Should there be history of allergic rhinitis or asthma, a new diagnosis might be used – atopic dermatitis, but this has its problems, as the causative allergens are rarely found, contrary to the case with hay fever or asthma. Neurodermatitis is better than the synonym of lichen simplex of Brocq, but, once again, the person is led astray into believing that “nerves” or the proverbial stress is the etiologic agent.
- Lichen sclerosus atrophicus represent an atrophic process that is often found on the female genitalia. Its male counterpart is called balanitis xerotica. Do the red, scaling, and atrophic lesions really need seven syllable terminology, let alone challenges to the spelling capabilities of the clinician?
- Paget’s disease would seem to be a harmless eponym, honoring Sir William Paget who described:
  - Bone disease
  - Squamous cell carcinoma in situ of the areola, being more common in women
  - Squamous cell carcinoma in situ in areas other than the breast – extramammary

Using the word Paget then denotes three different diseases. Were not the terms so well established, it might be more appropriate to select nomenclature that was less confusing and possibly more explicit.

## **Good Names**

- Basal cell carcinoma is a very descriptive name, an improvement over basal cell epithelioma, and a significant change for the better over rodent ulcer. The patient is anxious enough over the possible scarring to be caused by the surgical removal of this malignancy. There is no good reason to add to the worry by suggesting that a rat created the problem.
- Acne represents a sebaceous gland disorder where many of the lesions can be pointed and so, the misconstruing of acne to acme is not so terrible. Acne vulgaris is another mouthful that is unnecessary to perpetuate, while acne rosacea does not provide more information over the one-word, rosacea.
- Contact dermatitis says just what it means – a reaction due to contact with a substance. Adding irritant or allergic to the terminology may be informative, but equally so, causes problems for the simplicity of the term, contact dermatitis.

## **Conclusions**

Perhaps, we have just scratched the surface. While we may not have reformed dermatologic nomenclature, we have presented some of our thoughts.

## **Reference**

1. Leider, M, Rosenblum, M: A dictionary of dermatological words, terms and phrases. New York, Blakiston, 1968:440 pg