



Glossary of Medical Terms

In common with many other industries, the health care field has its own "shorthand." Listed below are some of the words and abbreviations frequently used in a hospital setting.

When speaking with a health care professional check their photo ID badges to become familiar with the staff. Please be sure to ask for an explanation of anything you don't fully understand.

Hospital Staff

Attending (MD)—a physician with primary responsibility for a patient's care.

Child Life Specialist—educated in child development, Child Life Specialists work with children and families to help them cope with being in the hospital. They use education, medical play and activities to help the child feel more comfortable. They also organize and supervise the playroom and can provide toys and games at the bedside.

Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)—a nurse who has graduated from an accredited school of vocational nursing but has less extensive clinical training than a registered nurse.

Medical Students (MS)— students completing their last few years of medical school. They work under close supervision and do not make independent decisions about diagnosis or treatments.

Nurse Practitioner—a registered nurse with at least a master's degree in nursing and advanced education in a medical specialty.

Registered Nurse (RN)—a nurse who has graduated from an accredited nursing program, has passed the state exam for licensure, and is registered and licensed to practice by a state authority.

Residents—physicians completing more specialized training. They participate in the patient's care under the direction of an attending physician.

Service—a division of the hospital medical staff devoted to a particular specialty.

Medical Abbreviations

- **AMA**—against medical advice
- **ac**—before meals.
- **ad lib**—as desired.
- **amt.**—amount.
- **ASAP**—as soon as possible.
- **ASD**—atrial septal defect. A congenital defect in the heart between the atria.

- **BID**—twice a day (sometimes q12h or every 12 hours).
- **BM**—bowel movement.
- **BP**—blood pressure.
- **BRP**—bathroom privileges.
- **CA**—cancer.
- **cal**—calories.
- **cath**—catheterization.
- **CBC**—complete blood count
- **cc**—cubic centimeters.
- **CC**—chief complaint.
- **CBC**—complete blood count.
- **CNS**—central nervous system.
- **c/o**—complaints of
- **COPD**—chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- **CPAP**—continuous positive airway pressure.
- **CPR**—cario-pulmonary resuscitation.
- **CT**—computed tomography, also referred to as CAT (computer axial tomography). Three-dimensional image of a body structure constructed by computer from a series of cross-sectional images. CT scans reveal both bone and soft tissues, including organs, muscles and tumors.
- **DNR**—do not resuscitate.
- **DOB**—date of birth.
- **Drsg**—dressing.
- **ECG or EKG**—electrocardiogram. A graphic record of the action of the heart.
- **EEG**—(electroencephalogram) measures electrical activity of the brain.
- **EKG**—electrocardiogram.
- **ENT**—ear, nose and throat.
- **ED**—emergency department
- **ER**—emergency room
- **Gastrostomy Tube**—surgically placed tube that goes directly into the stomach for feedings and/or drainage.
- **GB**—gall bladder.
- **GI**—gastrointestinal.
- **gm**—gram.
- **gtt**—drops
- **H₂O**—water.
- **H/A**—headache
- **hct**—hematocrit.
- **hgb**—hemoglobin.
- **HOB**—head of bed.
- **ht**—height.
- **HTN**—hypertension.
- **hx**—history.
- **I & D**—incision and drainage.
- **I & O**—intake and output. A measurement of fluids taken in and urinated out.
- **ICU**—intensive care unit.
- **IM**—intramuscular or into the muscle.
- **IV**—intravenous. The delivery of fluids and/or medication into the blood stream via a needle inserted into a vein.
- **K**—potassium.
- **kg**—kilogram.
- **KVO**—keep vein open.
- **lb.**—pound.
- **LOC**—loss of consciousness.
- **LP**—lumbar puncture.
- **Max**—maximum.
- **mEq**—milliequivalent.

- **MRI**—magnetic resonance imaging. Computerized images based on nuclear magnetic resonance of atoms within the body induced by the application of radio waves. An MRI scan provides 3-D images of the body's interior, delineating muscle, bone, blood vessels, nerves, organs and tumor tissue.
- **MRSA**—methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus.
- **MVA**—motor vehicle accident.
- **MVR**—mitral valve replacement.
- **n/a**—not applicable.
- **N/S**—normal saline.
- **Na**—sodium.
- **Nasogastric**—a tube that leads from the nose or mouth into the stomach.
- **neg**—negative.
- **NG**—nasogastric.
- **NKA**—no known allergies.
- **no. or #**—number.
- **NP**—nurse practitioner.
- **NPO**—nothing by mouth; nothing to eat or drink usually within a defined time frame
- **Nsg**—nursing.
- **NSR**—normal sinus rhythm.
- **NTG**—nitroglycerin.
- **N&V**—nausea and vomiting.
- **NWB**—non-weight bearing.
- **O₂**—oxygen.
- **OB**—obstetrical.
- **OB/GYN**—obstetrics and gynecology.
- **ODA**—operating day admission. The patient is admitted to the hospital the day the surgery is scheduled.
- **oint**—ointment.
- **OOB**—out of bed.
- **OR**—operating room.
- **OT**—occupational therapy.
- **oz**—ounce.
- **P**—pulse.
- **PA**—physician's assistant.
- **PAC**—premature atrial contraction.
- **PAT**—paroxysmal atrial tachycardia or preadmission testing (depending on context).
- **pc**—after meals
- **PDA**—patent ductus arteriosus.
- **PE**—physical examination.
- **Ped**—pediatric.
- **per os**—by mouth.
- **PERL**—pupils equal and reactive to light.
- **PERLA**—pupils equal and reactive to light & accommodation.
- **PET Scan**—positron emission tomography
- **PFT**—pulmonary function test.
- **pH**—symbol for expression of concentration of hydrogen ions (degree of acidity).
- **PICC Line**—(peripherally inserted central catheter) for delivery of medication into the bloodstream.
- **PIC-U**—pediatric intensive care unit. A unit staffed by Pediatric Intensivists (pediatricians with special training in the care of critically ill infants and children) and other highly-skilled specialists.
- **PIMU**—pediatric intermediate or "step down" unit. A unit that admits less critically ill children and is also a transitional unit following a stay in the PICU.
- **PM or p.m.**—afternoon (post meridian).
- **PMS**—premenstrual syndrome.
- **po**—per os (by mouth).
- **post-op**—postoperative.

- **Preop**—preoperative.
- **prep**—prepare.
- **PRN**—when necessary; on request or when needed within time guidelines
- **PROM**—passive range of motion.
- **PT**—physical therapy.
- **Pt or pt.**—patient.
- **PTA**—prior to admission.
- **PVC**—premature ventricular contraction.
- **PWB**—partial weight bearing.
- **q**—each, every (quaque).
- **qd**—every day (quaque die).
- **qh**—every hour (quaque hora).
- **qid**—four times daily (quater in die).
- **QID**—four times a day (sometimes q6h or every 6 hours).
- **QD**—once a day.
- **QNS**—quantity not sufficient.
- **qod**—every other day (quater otra die).
- **qs**—sufficient quantity (quantum sufficiat).
- **Qt.**—quart.
- **q2h, q3h, etc**—every two hours, every three hours, etc.
- **Rehab**—rehabilitation
- **Resp.**—respiration.
- **RBC**—red blood cells.
- **RN**—Registered Nurse.
- **R/O**—rule out.
- **ROM**—range of motion.
- **R/R**—respiratory rate.
- **RR**—recovery room.
- **RT**—radiation therapy.
- **Rt**—right.
- **RTC**—return to Clinic.
- **Rx**—prescription, treatment, or therapy.
- **s [needs line over s]**—without (sine).
- **SG**—specific gravity.
- **sm**—small.
- **SNF**—skilled nursing facility.
- **SOB**—shortness of breath.
- **S/P**—status post.
- **sp gr**—specific gravity.
- **staph**—staphylococcal, staphylococcus.
- **Stat**—immediately (statim).
- **STD**—sexually transmitted disease.
- **Strep**—streptococcus
- **Sx**—symptoms.
- **T**—temperature.
- **tab**—tablet.
- **T&A**—tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy.
- **tbsp**—tablespoon.
- **TIA**—transient ischemia attacks.
- **tid**—three times a day (sometimes q8h or every 8 hours).
- **TLC**—total lung capacity.
- **TPR**—temperature, pulse, respirations.
- **tsp**—teaspoon.
- **UA**—urinalysis.
- **UGI**—upper gastrointestinal
- **URI**—upper respiratory infection.

- **UTI**— urinary tract infection.
- **Vol**— volume.
- **vs**— against or versus.
- **VS**— vital signs.
- **VSD**—ventricular septal defect. A congenital defect in the septum of the heart.
- **w/**— with.
- **WB**— weight bearing.
- **WBC**— white blood cells.
- **W/C**— wheel chair.
- **WNL**— within normal limits.
- **w/o**— without.
- **wt**— weight.
- **XR**— x-ray.
- **x-match**— cross match.
- **yo**— year old.
- **yr**— year.

Medical Terminology

- **Antiemetic**— medication to control vomiting.
- **Benign**— a term to describe a tumor that is not cancerous.
- **Blood pressure**— a measure of the force of blood flow against veins and arteries.
- **Blood count**— the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets in a sample of blood. Also referred to as CBC (complete blood count).
- **Bypass**— to divert flow from one structure to another.
- **Catheter**— a tube used to inject or withdraw fluids.
- **Elastic stockings**— Hose designed to help blood circulate from the legs to the heart to prevent clots.
- **Extubation**— removal of a tube that has been inserted to get air to the lungs.
- **Febrile**— denoting or relating to fever.
- **Foley catheter**— a tube placed in the bladder to drain urine.
- **Hemovac**— a tube placed near an incision during surgery to drain excess fluid.
- **Infusion**— slow and/or prolonged intravenous delivery of a drug or fluids.
- **Intubation**— the insertion of a tube into a hollow organ such as the trachea (in order to get air to the lungs).
- **Palliative**— relieving the symptoms or pain of a disease or disorder without effecting a cure.
- **Radiology**— x-rays and other imaging techniques.
- **Respirator**— an apparatus to administer artificial respiration (used when a patient cannot breathe adequately without it).
- **Subcutaneous**— under the skin.
- **Traction**— the act of drawing or pulling with ropes, pulleys and weights.
- **Tracheostomy (also referred to as tracheotomy)**— an incision made in the neck to allow the passage of air directly into the trachea to reach the lungs.
- **Urinalysis**— A test of a urine specimen.
- **Ventilator**— see Respirator.
- **Void**— urinate.

Conversions and Abbreviations

All information and measurements are approximate.

Conversions

- **cc and ml:** approximately the same measurement
5 cc = 1 teaspoon
15 cc = 1 tablespoon (or 1/2 fluid ounce)
- **kilogram (kg):** 2.2 pounds in a kilogram.
A 5 kg baby weighs 11 pounds (2.2 x 5)
- **centimeter (cm):** 2.5 centimeters in an inch.
A 45 cm baby measures 18 inches (45 cm divided by 2.5 = 18 inches)
- **centigrade (C) temperature vs. Fahrenheit (F):**
37 degrees C = 98.6 degrees F.
Multiply the centigrade (C) degrees by 1.8 and add 32 to convert to fahrenheit (F).
If your temperature is 38.2 C, it is 100.8 F (38.2 C x 1.8 + 32 = 100.8 F).

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