Response to “Lost in Translation: Presenting Your Manuscript to the World”

To the editor,

Our language is rich, and evolving, and should be used correctly. However, authors needn't be restricted to the first meaning of a word listed in the dictionary, and readers of literature, even medical literature, should keep nearby, and use, their dictionaries. Mr. Kullman may not enjoy the works of *West Suburban Cardiologists*, but the sentences he cites are concise, accurate, and both medically and grammatically correct, including their use of “present” [1,2]. I enjoy catching and exposing “doctor-speak”, but Mr. Kullman has not presented examples of this phenomenon.

Mr. Kullman would prefer to know whether the patient drove or was accompanied by a spouse; I might prefer to know whether the patient wore Velcro®-fastened shoes [3], but neither of us should base our criticisms on the authors' command of the English language.

Sincerely,

Marcel J Casavant MD FACEP FACMT
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REFERENCES

1. present 2. to appear for examination, treatment, etc., said of a patient [L., *praesens* (-sent-), pres. p of *prae* – *sum*, to be before, be at hand]. Stedman's Medical Dictionary 26th ed., **1995**: 1422.

2. present 7. to come to show (oneself) before a person, in or at a place, etc. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/present> (accessed: March 26, 2007).

3. Casavant MJ. Antibiotic not linked to autism. *Medical Hypotheses*, **2006**; 66(3): 678.

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Original Sentence: “This patient presented with a very rare tumor which presented clinically as dyspnea on exertion” [West Suburban Cardiologist qtd. in Kullman].

Revised Sentence: The patient arrived at the office; he had a very rare tumor that, upon exertion, caused dyspnea.

Dr. Casavant's definitions of the word presented clearly distinguish its medical and common usages. The medical usage of the word is confined to “a patient,” and the common usage suggests a common introduction, a subtle but significantly important difference—especially if the person presenting is sick. Presented is part of doctor speak in great part because the community felt the need to define the term as part of the medical lexicon. By doing so, the medical community agreed to give the word significance, but the definition loses something when tumors start presenting.

Dr. Casavant suggests that the sentence in question is “concise, accurate, and both medically and grammatically correct, including [the] use of present.” I never suggest the sentence is not grammatically correct. I do suggest poor syntax, arrangements of words in a sentence, in part because of the repetition of the word presented and the tumor that comes with it.

And although Dr. Casavant did not see relevance in my hypothetical questions, emergency room personnel often record the mode of transportation and the carrier of the patient to the hospital. Such information has relevance in particular types of studies, and I encourage authors to include documented information in their manuscripts since the information is available. I posed theoretical questions that actually have relevance.

Sean J. Kullman, MA

Editor's Note: The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.