LETTERS—CONCISE RESEARCH REPORTS

Letter to the Editor: Eradicating Jargon-Oblivion—A Proposed Classification System of Medical Jargon

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Dear Editor,

We applaud Pitt and Hendrickson's article on jargon-oblivion.¹ It is important to recognize that jargon can be worse than uninterpretable, it can *also* cause harmful misinterpretation. This potential is magnified when jargon is placed in writing. Using the authors' framework, it is not difficult to find examples in typical medical record documentation subject to serious misinterpretation when read by a patient:

Alphabet soup: "This 58 y/o man is SOB."

Medicalized English: "We plan to move the patient to the floor today."

Judgmental jargon: "23 year old woman with morbid obesity."

The move towards "Open Notes" and other patient-facing transparent records makes recognizing potential harms of written jargon even more important and raises important questions about our use of language in medicine.² At the same time, we would submit that written communication *to* rather than *about* patients is an untapped opportunity to improve communication.³ On the Acute Care for Elders Service in Colorado, our physicians have for the last three years written "letters to patients" of our plans for the day to hospitalized patients and their families. We have found these letters serve as a valuable tool to improve satisfaction with as well as communication itself. At the same time, written communication exposes the stark difficulty of removing jargon: in retrospective review, 34% of our letters contained at least one incidence of jargon. The writing physicians frequently commented on the challenge of avoiding all jargon, even when deliberately attempting to write in patient-centric fashion.⁴ We are entering a new era of transparency of written medical documentation and Pitt and Hendrickson's timely article on jargon reminds us that the use of language is the essence of effective communication, and that effective communication is at the heart of medicine.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards:

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