

Lost in Translation?

Medical jargon is a real quagmire that can baffle people. Often terms sound very complicated but are actually simply Latin words describing what is happening. For instance the suffix "-itis" as in arthritis, arachnoiditis, spondylitis, etc. means inflammation of the affected part. "Arthr" is a prefix from the word meaning joint. Of course arachnoid is a term referring to the middle layer of the meninges (another foreign word) because it looks like a spider's web.

Apparently medical students increase their vocabulary by an average of 5,000 words during the first couple of years of undergraduate training. Many of the words they learn are of Latin or Greek origin. Of course, some patients might simply say "It's all Greek to me"! And sometimes the way doctors write, they might as well be writing in hieroglyphics for all the sense they seem to make!