



MEDICALESE GLOSSARY

Many professions use jargon, a collection of specialized or technical language unique to the field that may not be understood by people outside of that field. The use of slang, or informal words and expressions, as well as abbreviations is also common. Medicine is certainly no exception. Medical graduates (IMGs) who enter U.S. residency or fellowship positions will find that there are many terms that are particular to U.S. medicine. Many of these terms, which we call “Medicalese,” may be new and initially confusing to new medical graduates, even those who come from countries where the language of instruction is English and who speak and comprehend English quite well. U.S. “Medicalese” differs even from “Medicalese” in other English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom.

The Online Orientation for Incoming House Staff has developed this glossary of “Medicalese” to help orient new medical graduates to some of the terminology commonly used by doctors, nurses, and other medical staff in U.S. hospitals and clinics. It is our hope that this glossary will facilitate understanding of these terms when they are used by others.

Note that the table below includes several abbreviations or acronyms. These are included because they are often spoken as such. However, it may be better, especially for those new to “Medicalese,” to say the complete term in order to avoid any confusion.

It is important to understand that some of the slang, abbreviations, and jargon commonly used within medical practice might sound insensitive to patients or their families. These terms, therefore, should not be used in situations where they may be overheard. Unfortunately, some misguided medical staff may also use terms that are disrespectful or belittling to patients. Such inappropriate terms have no place whatsoever in the professional practice of medicine and are not included on this list.

As with all resources included in the Online Orientation for Incoming House Staff, the “Medicalese” glossary is a work in progress. If you have suggestions for additional words, phrases, or abbreviations to be added to this list, please submit them for consideration to bey9003@nyp.org.

Term	Definition	Use
ABG	arterial blood gas	Get an ABG on that asthmatic patient.
AMA	against medical advice; a way of leaving the hospital	The patient wants to leave AMA.
bag	to breathe for the patient artificially using a hand-operated device called an ambu-bag	This patient is very hard to bag.
banana bag	intravenous infusion bag containing multivitamins (appears yellow)	Hang a banana bag on her.
bili	bilirubin	Has his bili come down from yesterday?
bladder scan	a bedside ultrasound to measure the amount of residual urine	Let’s get a bladder scan and see if his prostatic enlargement is the problem.
blow	to destroy a vein while trying to insert an IV	That medical student has already blown every vein in both of that elderly patient’s arms.
BMP	basic metabolic panel (electrolytes and renal function)	Everyone on his service gets a BMP on admission.

Term	Definition	Use
boarders	patients from other services occupying beds on the team's ward or floor; usually unwelcome	I have two boarders on my service.
boo-boo / owee	what children may call an injury	Can you show me your boo-boo [or owee]?
bounce / bounce back	patient returns to service from which he or she had recently been discharged or transferred	He was discharged yesterday, but he bounced back today.
BP	blood pressure	The BP is too high!
brady / brady down	slowing heart rate	Whoops, he is starting to brady down.
bronch (pronounced bronk)	perform a bronchoscopy	Pulmonary is going to bronch her tomorrow morning.
bugs	germs; infecting organisms (bacteria, viruses, etc.)	Her decreased immunity sets her up for all kinds of bugs.
bump	to increase the dose of a drug	He is still having too many seizures; let's bump the Dilantin.
CABG (pronounced cabbage)	coronary artery bypass graft	He had a CABG three years ago.
CAD	coronary artery disease	He was admitted for workup of his CAD.
call	1) night or weekend duty at the hospital; also, "call night," "call schedule," etc. 2) short for judgment call; decision in which there is no clearly right answer	1) I'm on call this weekend. 2) It's a tough call whether or not to add another antibiotic.
call a code	to initiate or announce the start of a patient resuscitation effort	I just lost her pulse; call a code!
cath	catheterization	What did the cath show about his coronaries?
CBC	complete blood count	Get a CBC on him tomorrow morning.
Cdiff	Clostridium difficile	She grew out Cdiff in her cultures.
Chem-7	same as basic metabolic panel (electrolytes and renal function)	Everyone on his service gets a Chem-7 on admission.
CHF	congestive heart failure	His CHF is so bad he can't lie down flat.
code	to use full emergency measures to resuscitate a patient who has suffered a heart or breathing stoppage; also, a noun referring to the process	How long has this code been going?
consent [a patient]	go through the consent process with a patient in order to obtain his/her signed consent	Make sure you consent Mr. Green for his procedure tomorrow.
CPS	Child Protective Services	These bruises look suspicious; we need to get CPS involved.
crash	sudden, rapid, and often unanticipated deterioration of a patient	He looked fine. I never expected him to crash like that.
crash cart	a cart on wheels that contains all drugs, equipment, and devices for managing cardiac arrest and other emergencies that is brought to the patient's bedside	I can't get a pulse! Call for the crash cart!

Term	Definition	Use
crit	hematocrit	Get a crit every hour until it stabilizes.
C-section	cesarean section	Because of the fetal distress, we went with a C-section.
C-spine / T-spine / L-spine	cervical, thoracic, or lumbar spine	Patients with that kind of injury are at risk for C-spine injuries.
D&C	dilatation and curettage	If the vaginal bleeding continues, we may consider a D&C.
D/C	1) discontinue 2) discharge (Note: It is critical to distinguish between these two meanings.)	D/C the heparin before he gets D/Ced to the nursing home.
de-sating	decreasing oxygen saturation	Let's get some oxygen on her; she's de-sating!
dispo	disposition	We need to get started on arranging his dispo.
DNR	do not resuscitate; a designation unofficially or in some cases officially given to patients who are not to receive heroic measures (not to be coded) in the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest	Does this patient have a DNR order? Is this patient DNR?
DOA	dead on arrival	Two of the patients from the accident were DOA.
doc	common term of address or referral for physicians by patients and medical staff	We need to get in touch with her doc.
DOE	dyspnea on exertion	He had no orthopnea or DOE.
DVT	deep venous thrombosis	You have to consider DVT in all post-op patients.
ED / ER	Emergency Department or Emergency Room	We have two admissions waiting down in the ER [or ED].
EKG / ECG	electrocardiogram	Her EKG [or ECG] did not show any acute changes.
EMS	Emergency Medical Services (the ambulance and rescue system); see Fire Rescue	EMS is on the scene of a three-car accident.
EMT	Emergency Medical Technician	The EMT said he stopped breathing about two minutes before the ambulance arrived.
EOM	extraocular movement	He showed some paralysis of his EOMs on upward gaze.
eyeball	to examine visually	Let's remove that dressing; I want to eyeball the wound.
Fire Rescue	medical emergency response service; see EMS	Fire Rescue is bringing in a seizing kid.
frequent flyer	A patient who has frequent admissions to the hospital or to the Emergency Department	Review his old records before you order a lot of workup because he is a frequent flyer.

Term	Definition	Use
GI cocktail	a combination of medications to treat gastric distress, variable by institution	Let's try a GI cocktail and see how she responds.
GSW	gunshot wound	He sustained a GSW of the left chest.
H&H	hemoglobin and hematocrit	What was his last H&H?
high	under the influence of narcotics or other mood/mind altering drugs	When he presented to the ED he was obviously high.
I&D	incision and drainage	The only way to deal with an abscess is to I&D it.
I&O	measurement of fluid intake and output	All renal patients need strict I&Os.
keep an eye on	watchful waiting, continued observation	Let's hold off on the blood and keep an eye on him for now.
line	intravenous access	You are going to need a big line to give that drug.
LOC	loss of consciousness	When he fell, was there any LOC?
LP	lumbar puncture (spinal tap)	Was there blood in the LP?
lytes	electrolytes	His lytes suggest dehydration.
MI	myocardial infarction	This EKG clearly shows an old MI.
migraine cocktail	a combination of medications to treat migraine headaches, variable by institution	Let's try a migraine cocktail and see how she responds.
MVA	motor vehicle accident	He was the passenger in an MVA.
neb	medicated nebulizer treatment	That asthmatic kid needs another neb.
orthopods, pods	orthopedists	After we stabilize him, we need to get the pods to see him.
out	unresponsive	He was out for about 15 minutes after his head injury.
pace	regulate or provide a heart rhythm by applying an artificial pacemaker	Her rate is dropping way too low; we need to pace her.
PCP / PMD	primary care provider or primary physician	We need to get some more information from his PCP [or PMD].
PE	pulmonary embolism	With sudden chest pain and shortness of breath you always worry about a PE.
PEG / PEG tube	percutaneous gastrostomy used for enteral feeding	She is going to need a PEG [or PEG tube] to get her some sustenance.
PND	paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea	PND is one of the hallmarks of CHF.
preemie	a prematurely born baby	That preemie is going to need to go to the PICU right away.
prepped	prepared for a procedure	Get her prepped for an LP.
pulse ox	pulse oximetry	He doesn't look so good, let's get him on a pulse ox.

Term	Definition	Use
round	briefly evaluate each patient on a service by physically visiting the patient at the bedside, reviewing his or her progress, and planning further management	We round at 7 a.m. every day.
run the list	review updated diagnostic results, clinical course, and treatment plans for all patients on a service, on a patient-by-patient basis	Let's run the list right after lunch.
sharps	Needles, scalpels, IV catheters - anything that could be contaminated and needs to be placed in a sharps container before disposal	Okay, let's get all the sharps off the field.
shock	defibrillate or cardiovert a patient by applying paddles to the patient's chest to deliver a charge	No pulse. Shock him again!
SOB	shortness of breath	She had obvious SOB at rest.
soft admission	patient for whom the need for admission is questionable	That chest pain was really a soft admission.
STAT	immediately, as opposed to routine	I need an EKG STAT!
STD / STI	sexually transmitted disease / sexually transmitted infection	Did she have any prior history of STDs [or STIs]?
sundowning	tendency of altered or demented patients to become agitated as night falls	He may need a little sedation if he starts sundowning.
through and through	a gunshot wound that has both an entrance and an exit wound	There was a through and through of the left thigh.
TM	tympanic membrane	This little guy has got an angry looking TM, no wonder his ear hurts!
tox screen	blood test to determine what drugs are in a patient's system	If he doesn't wake up soon, we should get a tox screen on him.
trach (pronounced trake)	perform a tracheostomy	Call ENT to trach this guy.
tracks	needle marks usually from IV drug abuse	With all those tracks, it is going to be tough to get a line in.
Triage	the system of prioritizing patients in an emergency situation in which there are a great number of injured or ill	We need to triage these MVA victims.
triple-A	abdominal aortic aneurysm	That mass in the abdomen could be a triple-A.
tube	intubate	He is tiring out; we are going to need to tube him.
turf	transfer the patient to another service	That patient was turfed to us from Surgery.
vent	a mechanical ventilator	She is tiring out. We will need to get her on a vent right away.
zonked, zonked out	heavily sedated, asleep	I think he's had enough; he's zonked.