Review of Medical Terminology

Many groups of people, such as those involved with certain careers, sports, or hobbies, have a language that is used by members of that group. For example, basketball players know what a "full-court press" is. Bank tellers know what a "debit" is. These words can seem strange at first. But as the person learns more about the group, these words become a normal part of the person's language.

The medical field, like other groups, has a language of its own. And since you are a part of that group, as a home health aide, you use the language of the group. You use this language when reading about your assignment and care, documenting observations and care, and talking with other healthcare workers. It is very important that you understand this language in order to care for your clients safely and to communicate with team members.

This newsletter will discuss medical terms used in healthcare settings, as well as how these terms are formed. When you understand the parts of a word, you can figure out what the word means, even if you haven't seen it before.

Medical terms are often formed by combining word parts. The *root* is the basis, or main part, of the word. It gives the main meaning of the word. The root often refers to a body part or medical condition:

COMMON ROOT WORDS

arthr —	joint	hem —	blood
cardi —	heart	hepat—	liver
col —	colon	hydr —	water
crani —	skull	nephr —	kidney
cyst —	bladder	neur —	nerve
cyt —	cell	oste —	bone
derma —	skin	psych —	mind
gastr—	stomach	pulm —	lung
glyc —	sugar	septic—	infection

You may wonder why a lot of medical terms do not sound like words used in the English language. For example, why do words related to the heart have "cardi" in them instead of "heart"? This is because many medical words come from other languages, such as Latin and Greek.

In addition to the root word, another word part used in medical terms is the *prefix*. It is always found at the beginning of a word. Prefixes often describe the root word. An example is the prefix "brady", which means slow. When brady is added to the root word cardia (heart), the term bradycardia means slow heart rate. If "tachy" means fast, what does tachycardia mean? You're right if you said fast heart rate! Are you beginning to see how you can understand medical terms simply by knowing what their word parts mean? Here are some common prefixes and their meanings:

COMMON PREFIXES

Prefix		Example	Meaning
a or an	(*without*)	asepsis	*without* infection
ante	(*before*)	antepartal	*before* birth
brady	(*slow*)	bradycardia	*slow* heart rate
hemi	(*half*)	hemiplegia	paralysis on *half* of the body
hyper	(*high*)	hypertension	*high* blood pressure
hypo	(*low*)	hypodermic	*below* the skin (as in injection)
peri	(*around*)	periosteum	membrane *around* the bone
poly	(*many*)	polyuria	*too much* (excessive) urine
pre	(*before*)	preoperative	*before* the operation
tachy	(*fast*)	tachycardia	*fast* heart rate

Another word part that is sometimes used is the *suffix*. It is always found at the end of a word. Like the prefix, it describes the root word. An example is the suffix "itis", which means inflammation. What word is formed when you pair the root word hepat (liver) with the suffix itis? Hepat + itis = hepatitis… inflammation of the liver. What term is made when the root word arthr (joint) is put with the suffix itis? You're right if you said arthritis, or joint inflammation. Some common suffixes are listed in the table below.

Some medical terms have all of the word parts — prefix, root word and suffix. An example of this is the term hypoglycemia. The prefix hypo means low. The root word glyc means sugar. And the suffix emia means in the blood. So what does

COMMON SUFFIXES

Suffix		Example	Meaning
algia	(*pain*)	arthralgia	joint *pain*
ectomy	(*removal of*)	colectomy	*removal of* the colon
emia	(*blood*)	anemia	without enough *blood*
itis	(*inflammation*)	dermatitis	*inflammation* of the skin
logy	(*study of*)	psychology	*study of* the mind
otomy	(*incision*)	craniotomy	*incision* into the skull
plegia	(*paralysis*)	hemiplegia	*paralysis* on one side

the term mean? Low blood sugar! When you look at medical terms in charts or books, try to find the prefix, root word and suffix of these terms. You'll find that your understanding of these terms will quickly increase.

Abbreviations are also very important in medical language and communication. These are short forms of words we use often. Some abbreviations are easy to understand, because they come from common words, such as OOB (out of bed). Other abbreviations, such as prn (as needed), come from Latin words. Be careful when using abbreviations in your charting. Every healthcare facility has a list of abbreviations that should not be used. Be sure to check this list at your agency, and use only approved abbreviations. Some common abbreviations include the following:

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

ac – before meals	I & O –intake and output
ad lib – as desired	ml - milliliter
amb – ambulate	NPO – nothing by mouth
bid – twice a day	pc – after meals
CVA – stroke	prn - as needed
HOB – head of bed	ROM – range of motion
HR - heart rate	tid– three times a day

When you understand medical terms and abbreviations, you are better able to carry out your duties as a home health aide. You can communicate clearly and quickly with other members of your team, both in writing and verbally. You can also better understand and carry out written orders.

Don't expect to understand medical terms all at once, as there are so many words and abbreviations. If you're not sure what a word means, be sure to ask your supervisor. It's much better to ask than to make a mistake. Use a medical dictionary at work to increase your knowledge. Work on your understanding of medical terms a little bit each day. You'll be surprised at how much you know in a short time!

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NAME: _____   DATE: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

_____1. The suffix in the word nephrology means "study of."
      A. True
      B. False

_____2. A prefix is always found at the beginning of a word.
      A. True
      B. False

_____3. The order "Ambulate bid" means that the home health aide should ambulate the client:
      A. once per day
      B. twice per day
      C. three times per day
      D. four times per day

_____4. A client is to have her blood glucose checked ac, which means:
      A. before bedtime
      B. when she wakes up in the morning
      C. before meals
      D. after meals

5 – 10: Match each medical term in Column A with its definition in Column B.
        (Hint: Use your knowledge of prefixes and suffixes!)

COLUMN A:

5. _____ gastrectomy

6. _____ hypotension

7. _____ cystitis

8. _____ neuralgia

9. _____ preoperative

10. _____ hematuria

COLUMN B:

A. inflammation of the bladder
B. before the operation
C. removal of the stomach
D. blood in the urine
E. low blood pressure
F. before birth
G. nerve pain