

"A Drug by Any Other Name"

I was listening to a medical report on my way to my office. A doctor was chatting about some new drugs hitting the market, but frankly, I had difficulty following the discussion, getting lost keeping track of names like "Exthorpomine" and "Formacrophren."

We're already bombarded by overly technical lingo from our medical providers, who tell us we need diagnostic tests using things like Magnetic Bivalve Refractometers. Surgical procedures too are dubbed with names like Fibular Pancreaonic Mycardopectomies. They could just say "You know that bad thing we talked about? We're going to remove it."

Every other profession bases its jargon on Real English Words. In the computer field, take the term "download." Down is a word. Load is a word. Download! Even spamming, a term to describe a type of junk mail, is a real word named after some kind of canned junk meat, which I presume the company used to send out unsolicited in bulk mailings.

The problem is, companies invent a new drug and feel compelled to invent a word too, one that they are confident no human being until that day has never muttered. They take any pronounceable sound... Gred...Progno...Neplin ... link a couple of them together..... add a medical sounding suffix like ene, ase, ac, or phren. Bingo, they've just named a drug. Gredomine. Prognotase. Neplinophren. If these aren't drugs on the market now, they will be.

But my concern about complicated drug names is safety. My doctor is getting older now and he frequently can't even find his prescription pad, so it makes me a wee bit uncomfortable knowing that he must remember the difference between names like Ferretpholene, which, say, will treat my hay fever, and Ferretphacase, which will dissolve my internal organs.

"Mr. Goldstone," my doctor will say, "Did the sneezing stop?"

"No doctor," I'll answer, "But my liver feels all...tingly."

And what about me, taking a drug whose side effects include drowsiness and the inability to use my both of my eyes simultaneously. In two hours, amid my drug induced confusion, I'll have to go back to my medicine cabinet and try to find the same drug again. During these drug stupor moments, if I read "Take one capsule three times a day," it's likely I'll be calling down from the bathroom, "Dear, how many is three"

So, maybe it's time we demand drug names that we lay people can understand. Something simple and descriptive, for instance Merck's Extra Strength Lung Opener..... Or perhaps Squibb's Pink Eye Helper.