



Medical English: Language and Communication in Healthcare

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

Medical English refers to the vocabulary and communication skills used in healthcare settings — clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, and emergency rooms. For non-native English speakers, a basic medical vocabulary is not just an academic exercise; it is a practical tool that can directly affect health outcomes. Miscommunication between a patient and healthcare provider can lead to **misdiagnosis**, incorrect medication dosages, or delays in critical treatment. Studies show that patients who can describe their **symptoms** accurately receive faster and more effective care.

When a patient visits a doctor, the consultation typically follows a structured pattern. The doctor first collects a **medical history** — information about past illnesses, surgeries, current medications, and known **allergies**. Next comes the **physical examination**, during which the doctor uses tools like a **stethoscope** to listen to heart and lung sounds, checks blood pressure, and assesses reflexes. The ability to describe pain precisely — as sharp, dull, throbbing, or burning — significantly helps narrow the **differential diagnosis**, the list of possible conditions the doctor considers.

After the examination, the doctor makes a **diagnosis** and proposes a **treatment plan**. This may include prescription medication, lifestyle changes, physiotherapy, or referral to a **specialist**. Patients who understand medical terminology are better able to ask informed questions, weigh their options, and follow treatment instructions correctly. Key questions patients should feel comfortable asking include: "What are the side effects of this medication?" "Is this condition chronic or temporary?" and "What happens if I don't treat this?"

In emergency situations, clear and fast communication is critical. Emergency medical staff use standardized **triage** protocols to assess the severity of a condition and prioritize care. Knowing phrases such as "I am having chest pain and difficulty breathing" or "She is unconscious and not responding" can save vital minutes. Patients should also be able to provide information about pre-existing conditions, current medications, and drug allergies, which emergency doctors need immediately to make safe treatment decisions.

As healthcare becomes more international, medical English skills are increasingly valuable beyond patients. Nurses, medical assistants, lab technicians, and hospital administrators all benefit from strong English communication skills when dealing with foreign patients, international research, or multinational pharmaceutical companies. Many healthcare professionals now pursue dedicated **Medical English** courses or **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)** programs designed specifically for the medical field, recognizing that language competence is as important as technical knowledge in delivering quality care.



A. Vocabulary

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. misdiagnosis _____ | a. a doctor who has advanced training in a specific area of medicine |
| 2. medical history _____ | b. describing a condition that lasts a long time or recurs repeatedly |
| 3. stethoscope _____ | c. an abnormal immune reaction to a substance such as food, medicine, or pollen |
| 4. differential diagnosis _____ | d. a medical instrument used to listen to sounds inside the body |
| 5. treatment plan _____ | e. English for Specific Purposes — English teaching designed for a particular professional field |
| 6. specialist _____ | f. a doctor's organized approach to managing and treating a condition |
| 7. triage _____ | g. the process of sorting patients by urgency to prioritize who receives care first |
| 8. chronic _____ | h. an incorrect identification of a patient's medical condition |
| 9. allergy _____ | i. a record of a patient's past and current health information |
| 10. ESP _____ | j. a list of possible conditions a doctor considers based on symptoms |

B. True or False

- ____ 1. Medical English is only useful for doctors and nurses, not other hospital staff.
- ____ 2. Patients who describe their symptoms accurately tend to receive faster care.
- ____ 3. A medical history includes information about past illnesses and current medications.
- ____ 4. A stethoscope is used to check a patient's blood pressure.
- ____ 5. A differential diagnosis is the doctor's final, confirmed conclusion about a patient's illness.
- ____ 6. Asking about side effects and treatment alternatives is considered poor patient behavior.
- ____ 7. Triage is a system used to prioritize patients based on the severity of their condition.
- ____ 8. Knowing phrases like "chest pain and difficulty breathing" can save critical time in emergencies.
- ____ 9. Medical English courses are a type of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program.



C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: triage, specialist, misdiagnosis, chronic, differential diagnosis

1. An incorrect identification of a patient's condition is called a _____.
2. Doctors create a list of possible conditions called a _____ before deciding on the final diagnosis.
3. Emergency departments use a _____ system to prioritize patients by the seriousness of their condition.
4. A patient with a _____ condition will need long-term management rather than a short course of treatment.
5. If a GP cannot manage a complex case, the patient is usually referred to a _____ for advanced care.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. According to the article, how can poor medical English communication affect patient health?
2. What is included in a patient's medical history, and why is it collected before the physical examination?
3. Why are medical English skills becoming valuable for healthcare workers beyond just doctors and nurses?

E. Discussion Questions

1. The article states that "language competence is as important as technical knowledge in delivering quality care." Do you agree? Can you think of a situation where poor communication could cause a serious medical mistake?
2. If you were a hospital administrator, what steps would you take to improve English communication between international patients and your medical staff? Consider both staff training and technology-based solutions.



Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-h, 2-i, 3-d, 4-j, 5-f, 6-a, 7-g, 8-b, 9-c, 10-e

B. True/False: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-F, 5-F, 6-F, 7-T, 8-T, 9-T

C. Fill Blanks: 1-misdiagnosis, 2-differential diagnosis, 3-triage, 4-chronic, 5-specialist

D. Comprehension:

1. According to the article, miscommunication between a patient and healthcare provider can lead to misdiagnosis, incorrect medication dosages, or delays in critical treatment — all of which can directly and negatively affect health outcomes.
2. A medical history includes information about past illnesses, surgeries, current medications, and known allergies. It is collected before the physical examination because it gives the doctor context that shapes what to look for during the exam and which treatments may be unsafe (e.g., due to drug allergies).
3. Medical English skills are becoming valuable for a wider range of healthcare workers because hospitals are increasingly international. Nurses, medical assistants, lab technicians, and hospital administrators all need to communicate with foreign patients, engage with international research, and work with multinational pharmaceutical companies — all of which require English proficiency.

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