Learning Objectives

- Describe what medical terms are used to describe.
- Explain the role of a prefix, root word, combining vowel, and suffix in a medical term.
- Interpret selected examples of medical prefixes, root words, combining vowels, and suffixes.
Learning Objectives

• Distinguish between singular and plural forms of medical terms.
• Use accepted medical abbreviations appropriately.
• Discriminate between similar medical terms and abbreviations.

The Language of Medicine

• Oldest written sources, Hippocratic writings, 5th/4th centuries BC
  – Beginning of Greek era
  – Lasted after Roman conquest
  – Renaissance (14th to 17th centuries), Greek language not widely understood
  – Greek words translated into Latin
  – Most medical terms Greek derived, Latin root
  – Disease terms usually Greek origin
  – Anatomy terms usually Latin origin

Word Parts

• Describe
  – Body structures, systems
  – Anatomical regions, locations
  – Diseases, other health problems
  – Medical, surgical procedures
  – Diagnostic tests
  – Medical instruments
Word Parts

• Broken down into one or more word parts
  – Prefixes
  – Suffixes
  – Root words
  – Some linking, combining vowels
  – Help in use, understanding

Word Parts

• Prefixes
  – One or more root syllables
  – Beginning of word
  – Describes location, intensity
• Example: abnormal
  – Prefix is ab = away from
  – Normal = within balance
  – Meaning = not within balance
Word Parts

• Suffixes
  – End of word
  – Describes condition, diagnosis
• Example: bronchitis
  – Root word is bronchi
  – Suffix is -itis = inflammation
  – Meaning = inflammation of bronchi

Word Parts

• Root words
  – Combined to describe particular structure, condition
  – Derived from Latin, Greek nouns, verbs, adjectives
• Example: cardiopulmonary
  – Root word is cardio = heart
  – Pulmonary = lungs
  – Meaning = cardiac and respiratory systems

Word Parts

• Combining vowels
  – Linking vowels
  – Make terms easier to pronounce
  – Vowel most used: o
    • Example: Sternocleidomastoid = stern-o-cleid-o-mastoid
  – Vowels i, a also used
  – Often used between root and suffixes, roots and other roots
  – Not used between prefixes and roots
Making Medical Terms Plural

• Majority of terms have Greek or Latin origin
• Unusual rules for turning singular into plural form
• If term ends in "a," add "e"
  – Bursa = bursae

Making Medical Terms Plural

• If term ends in “ex” or “ix,” change to “ices”
  – Appendix = appendices
  – Cervix = cervices
• If term ends in “is,” change to “es”
  – Diagnosis = diagnoses
• If term ends in “itis,” drop “s,” add “des”
  – Arthritis = arthritides

Making Medical Terms Plural

• If term ends in “nx,” change the “x” to “g,” add “es”
  – Pharynx = phalanges
• If term ends in “on,” change to “a”
  – Ganglion = ganglia
• If term ends in “um,” change to “a”
  – Diverticulum = diverticula
• If term ends in “us,” change to “i”
  – Alveolus = alveoli
Abbreviations, Acronyms, Symbols

• Useful for efficient communication, documentation
  – Thoroughness
  – Precision
  – Accuracy
  – Form of medical shorthand
  – Universally understood

Abbreviations, Acronyms, Symbols

• Do not use list
  – May 2005, Joint Commission affirmed “do not use” list of abbreviations
  – Eliminates abbreviations, acronyms, symbols, drug dose designations that could be confusing, dangerous, or might result in errors
  – EMS agencies, health care facilities use list as documentation protocol
  – Updated annually

Pronouncing Medical Terms

• Correct spelling, pronunciation necessary, expected
• Consider how terms are built
  – Analyze, understand, memorize root words, prefixes, suffixes
  – Pronunciation varies, no rigid rules
  – Some terms acceptably pronounced more than one way
  – Example: angina (an’jın a), emphasis first syllable, short i, and angina (an jın’ a), emphasis second syllable, long i
Pronouncing Medical Terms

• Some medical terms look alike, sound alike, but have very different meanings
• Pronunciation perfected by using term frequently, saying it aloud
• If unsure, check medical dictionary

Summary

• Medical terminology is language of medicine
  — Important to know it to communicate, interpret patient information with other health care personnel
• Medical terms are used to describe body structures, systems, and functions; anatomical regions and locations; diseases and other health problems; medical and surgical procedures; diagnostic tests; and medical instruments

Summary

• Medical terms are broken down into several parts, including prefixes, suffixes, root words, and some combining vowels
• Prefix is root syllable at the beginning of a word that describes location or intensity
• Suffix occurs at the end of a word and describes patient’s condition or diagnosis
Summary

• Root words describe structure or condition, may be combined with other root words, a prefix and/or a suffix
• Combining vowels join syllables in medical terms to make pronunciation easier
• Interpret medical terms by analyzing each word part, then combining them to determine the meaning

Summary

• There are specific rules to convert medical terms from singular to plural
• Medical abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols are forms of medical shorthand
  – Important to use abbreviations approved within your EMS system
• Must pronounce medical terms correctly so intended meaning will be communicated clearly

Questions?