Clinical Terminology for International Students

Valerie Swigart, Ph.D., RN, and Michael Gold, Ph.D.

This course provides strategies for learning U.S. clinical language, guidance on cultural issues, and a special reference for students who are planning to or have come to the United States for education in the health professions.

**Next Session:**
Date to be announced (6 weeks long)

**Workload:** 2-4 hours/week

**About the Course**

Students coming to the United States to begin or continue their studies in the health professions are often overwhelmed by differences in clinical-cultural expectations. American English “doctor-speak” or “nurse-speak” is essentially another new language that international students need to understand and use. This course provides students with strategies to learn effectively, plus a dictionary focused on commonly used abbreviations, acronyms, and phrases that will be most useful in clinical settings in the U.S.

The complexity of interactions and differences in how health care is delivered in U.S. clinical sites can be confusing and anxiety-provoking for international students. Short videos will demonstrate clinical interactions that are often baffling for international students, and how students can adjust to new clinical situations will be discussed. Guidance on how to negotiate difficult situations will be provided.

**About the Instructor(s)**

**Valerie Swigart, Ph.D., R.N.**, is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing. She is a distinguished educator with expertise in cross-culture communication.

**Michael Gold, Ph.D.,** is an Associate Professor Emeritus, Graduate
Course Syllabus

- **Week 1**: Introduction to the American clinical setting and American English clinical abbreviations and acronyms
- **Week 2**: Resources to decipher and learn to use American clinical abbreviations and acronyms
- **Week 3**: Strategies for learning the language of American clinical settings
- **Week 4**: Using abbreviations and acronyms safely
- **Week 5**: Managing situations that are complicated by cultural differences
- **Week 6**: Putting it altogether: Recognizing the culture and language interface

Recommended Background

This course is for undergraduate or graduate students in the health professions who will be receiving clinical practice education in the United States.

Suggested Readings

All references and materials will be offered within the course or found on the Internet.

Course Format

This course will consist of 6 videotaped lectures lasting about 30 minutes. Images and photos will be employed to demonstrate important concepts and negotiate language differences. Video clips will be used to portray cross-cultural interactions. When appropriate, video clips will assist those for whom English is a second language. There will be homework assignments and quiz questions with each class session.

FAQ

**Question**: Why do I need to learn these abbreviations and acronyms?
Abbreviations and acronyms are a large part of the verbal and written communication that occurs in clinical matters, you need to understand abbreviations and acronyms.

**Question:** Why can’t I just ask for clarification when someone uses an abbreviation or an acronym?

**Response:** Clinical settings in American hospitals and clinics are often very busy, noisy, places with people hurrying about to meet patients. There will be little time for explanation of the meanings of terms. The more emergent the situation, the more abbreviations and acronyms will be used. You will be expected to know common abbreviations and acronyms and react appropriately. It is not safe to guess a meaning of what someone is telling you.

**Question:** Will I learn all the medical or nursing abbreviations and acronyms?

**Response:** No. A major advantage of taking the course is learning which abbreviations and acronyms are most commonly used and with what safety precautions.

**Question:** Why do I need to study and think about cultural differences?

**Response:** Each nation develops its own medical system, hospitals and clinics. These institutions are profoundly influenced by the culture of the institution or clinical setting does not change about the new culture and adapt to the new clinical situation. Adapting may be as simple as learning how old or difficult as understanding and complying with standards of modesty.

**Question:** How will this course help me in my studies and my wish to be part of the healthcare team?

**Response:** Learning the language of the clinical area is essential to reading medical reports and charting. As you learn to use nurse-speak and doctor-speak and understand the cultural standards of conduct, you will feel more like a team member.

**Question:** Will I be able to interact with other students taking this course?

**Response:** Yes, a teacher-monitored discussion forum will be open to all members of the class throughout the course.

**Question:** Will the teacher interact with students during the course?

**Response:** During the week between class session 5 and class session 6, students will have the opportunity to interact with Dr. Swigart on topics pertaining to the culture of American clinical sites, cross-culture communication, and adapting to American clinical student practice.

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