State Budgetary Professional Educational Institution "Chelyabinsk Medical College"



# Cardiologist and Heart Attack: Why Do Doctors Have Two Languages?

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Table of Contents

Introduction....................................................................................................................3

Chapter 1. Greece: The Birth of Science........................................................................3

Chapter 2. Rome: Practicality and Law..........................................................................3

Chapter 3. The Middle Ages: Apothecaries and Common People.................................4

Chapter 4. The Renaissance: The Great Mix.................................................................4

Chapter 5. Why Did This Mix Win?..............................................................................5

Conclusion......................................................................................................................5

Cardiologist and Heart Attack: Why Do Doctors Have Two Languages?

Have you ever noticed that doctors seem to speak two languages at once?

On one hand, we hear strict Greek and Latin terms: cardiology, pneumonia, gastroscopy.

On the other hand, in their speech (and in our complaints) live simple English words: heart, lung, stomach.

Why did this happen? Why do doctors use one language for complex names of diseases and another for simple things? And what do the ancient Greeks and Romans have to do with it?

Let's travel back in time and see how the history of wars, epidemics, and printing shaped the medical English we know today.

Chapter 1. Greece: The Birth of Science

About 2,500 years ago in Ancient Greece, a revolution happened. A man named Hippocrates (the one with the oath) decided that diseases were not sent by gods, but by very earthly reasons — food, air, lifestyle.

The Greeks were pioneers. They gave names to everything they saw.

They called the heart — kardia.

The stomach — gaster.

The lung — pneumon.

If a Greek broke a bone, the doctor put on a bandage. If he had a runny nose, the doctor said that something "flows from the nose" (that's where the word rhin- for nose comes from). Greek medicine was descriptive and very precise.

When the Roman Empire conquered Greece, something surprising happened: culturally, the Greeks won. The Romans learned from them. Rich Romans sent their children to Greek schools, and they were often treated by Greek slave-doctors. Greek became the language of science and education, even in Rome.

Chapter 2. Rome: Practicality and Law

The Romans were not as theoretical as the Greeks. They were engineers, builders, and soldiers. Their language — Latin — was the language of commands, laws, and practical life.

A Roman doctor (often a freed slave) would speak Greek with his colleagues, but with a Roman patient, he spoke Latin. This is how two streams of words entered medicine.

For example, the Greek word "kardia" (heart) stayed in science to describe diseases. The Latin word "cor" gave life to other terms. But the most important thing the Romans did was create anatomy. Dissecting humans was forbidden, but Romans dissected animals and described everything in Latin.

This created a rule that works to this day:

- Names of diseases and treatments often have Greek roots.

- Descriptions of body parts and anatomy often have Latin roots.

Chapter 3. The Middle Ages: Apothecaries and Common People

While Europe was going through the Dark Ages, medicine was preserved in monasteries. Monks copied ancient texts in Latin. Latin was the language of the church and education, so any self-respecting doctor had to speak Latin, otherwise colleagues in Paris or Bologna wouldn't understand him.

But at the same time, common people lived. They spoke their own languages: Anglo-Saxon (Old English), Old French, and Scandinavian dialects.

This is when simple, everyday words entered the language.

Disease. This word came from Old French. It has two parts: dis- (meaning "without" or "absence of") and aise (meaning "comfort" or "ease"). So, literally, it means "without-comfort" or "absence of ease." Imagine a medieval peasant: he doesn't know he has a "pneumococcal infection." He just feels "not at ease" — he has a disease.

Drug. The history here is a bit complicated, but the most popular idea points to the Vikings. The Old Norse word draugr meant something dry and rotten. Later, it came to mean dried herbs, and then any kind of medicine.

A doctor in a hospital spoke Latin, but a grandmother selling herbs at the market spoke her own native language.

Chapter 4. The Renaissance: The Great Mix

In the 16th and 17th centuries, scientists started dissecting bodies again and making new discoveries. And then a problem appeared: the old Greek and Latin words were not enough for everything.

Scientists did a simple thing: they started making new terms from old building blocks. Like children playing with LEGO, doctors built new words.

This is the answer to our main question: why cardio- (Greek) and cardiac (Latin)?

Imagine a scientist describing an inflammation of the heart. He takes:

The Greek word kardia (heart).

The Greek ending -itis (inflammation).

And he gets carditis (or myocarditis, pericarditis — by adding more Greek prefixes).

But if that same scientist wants to say "related to the heart," he might take the Latin adjective cardiacus. In English, it sounds the same, but the historical root is different.

Here's a simple rule to sound smart:

We usually use Greek when talking about science, disease, and surgery. (Cardiology, gastroscopy, pediatrics).

We usually use Latin for anatomy and descriptive terms. (Cardiac, abdominal, cerebral).

Chapter 5. Why Did This Mix Win?

English is like a big soup with many ingredients. In 1066, the French (Normans) conquered England, and French became the language of the nobility. Later, during the Renaissance, it became fashionable to use Latin words in speech to sound smarter.

In the end, in a modern hospital, you will hear:

Anglo-Saxon roots: The simplest, most basic, "folk" words that patients use. To breathe, to cough, head, pain. These words are short and very old.

French/Latin influences: Words that became more "polite" or medical. Respiration (breathing), examination (check-up), mortal wound (deadly injury). They are longer.

Pure Latin and Greek: What doctors write in charts and say to each other professionally. Myocardial infarction (heart attack), gastroenteritis (stomach flu). This is the language of science, understood by a doctor in any country.

Conclusion: A Good Kind of Confusion

It might seem like a terrible mess. Why say renal (Latin) when you can say kidney (Old English)? Why say cardiac when there is heart?

The answer is simple: precision and international understanding.

When a doctor says "cardiology," a colleague from Japan, Russia, or Brazil will understand him. It's a universal code.

And when a patient says "my heart hurts," it's a warm, human word that any native speaker understands.

So, next time you visit a doctor, listen to their speech. You will hear the echo of Ancient Greece, the power of the Roman Empire, the rough talk of medieval traders, and the scientific precision of the Renaissance. All in one sentence: "You have acute rhinitis, so it's hard for you to breathe through your nose."

Nose — that's ours, ancient, simple. Rhinitis — that's Greek, scientific, precise.