Latina medicorum – Medical Latin

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Medical Latin is some kind of mixed language. Latin and Greek account for about 45% each, and the remaining 10% is made up of Arabic, Roman and Germanic languages. Latin, however, used to be the written and spoken language of medicine. As there is a large number of Greek loan words in medical Latin, even a Latinist may find the declension of nouns difficult. There are often exceptions to rules in the declining of the words, and, even for those who know some Latin, it is sometimes difficult to cope with the formation of the genitive, for example.

Latin is still the basis of medical language. It is a universal language enabling doctors in different countries to communicate with each other without much difficulty. In Latin, it is possible to make specific, accurate anatomical descriptions and diagnoses.

Latin studies are no longer compulsory in medical training, and in these days, the doctors' knowledge of Latin is rather insufficient. In their daily work, doctors use Latin especially when writing diagnoses. The terminology can easily be found by computer but, almost without exception, the terms are, however, incomplete and need clarification, removal of alternatives, etc. It seems incredible, but for example, probably the most common orthopedic diagnosis, knee strain, is written in the form of *Distorsio genu*. The word for word translation for this would be *the strain the knee*, whereas the meaning should be *the strain of the knee, Distorsio genus.* The 's' of the genitive suffix is regularly left out. It is, by all means, reasonable to expect that the doctor should know the correct spelling of the most common diagnoses in his or her speciality!

The first part of my lecture, *Medical Latin,* concentrates on getting to know the language. We go through the declension of nouns in different declension groups and learn how to add adjectives to nouns. We also learn the two most important cases: the nominative and the genitive. This presentation does not deal with the rather difficult conjugation of verbs, because in practical work, verbs are less important. In the second part of my lecture, we will make diagnoses on the basis of what we have just learnt, proceeding from easy ones to more complicated ones.

As supplementary material, two booklets – *Latina medicorum* and *Grammatica linguae Latinae* – are provided. They cover the essentials of medical Latin with appropriate grammatical references. Both the lecture and the booklets are mainly based on the excellent book, *Latina medicorum*, by Reijo Pitkäranta.