Suggested Lay Language for Informed Consent

Since informed consent documents need to be accessible to their audience, and since the lay population is not generally well versed in technical and scientific terminology, such jargon should be explained or common terms should be substituted. Complex scientific concepts should be translated into simple concepts that the typical subject can read and understand. Some examples of suggested lay language translations for informed consent forms are as follows:

**Acute:** new, recent, sudden

**Adverse effect:** side effect

**Aerosolized:** converted to a vapor or mist to be inhaled

**Afebrile:** without fever

**Alzheimer disease:** a brain disorder characterized chiefly by an impairment in the ability to think and to remember

**Analgesic:** pain reliever or relieving

**Anaphylaxis, shock:** a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction including difficulty breathing and a fall in blood pressure to shock levels

**Anesthetic:** a drug that reduces the ability to perceive pain

**Arm:** one part of a multiple-part study

**Artery:** one of the muscular blood vessels carrying blood from the heart to all parts of the body

**Aspirate:** to remove fluid from a body cavity or cyst

**Assay:** lab test

**Basal acid output:** acid produced by the resting stomach before food or medication

**Benign:** not malignant or threatening, usually without serious consequence

**Biopsy:** surgical removal of a small bit of tissue for microscopic examination

**Blind design:** “single-blind” means that the patient is not told which of the two or more possible treatments (medicine A, B, or C, for instance) will be given, but physicians and nurses will know. “Double-blind” means that the physician and nurses taking care of the patient also do not know.

**Bolus:** an amount given all at once

**Broad spectrum:** has a broad range of effectiveness, e.g. drug suppresses infections due to many classes of bacteria rather than just one class

**Calorie:** the energy value of food

**Carcinogenic:** capable of causing cancer

**CAT (CT) scan:** a computerized x-ray examination

**Catheter:** a thin, flexible plastic tube for withdrawing or introducing fluids

**Central line:** a thin plastic tube placed through a vein in the upper chest wall or neck and advanced into a large vein near the heart

**Central nervous system (CNS):** the brain and spinal cord

**Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF):** fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord

**Chemotherapy:** treatment of a disease, such as cancer, by drugs

**Chronic:** continuing for a long time

**Claustrophobic:** fear of being enclosed in a small space

**Clinical Trial:** an experiment in patients
Cognitive: thinking
Controlled Trial: a study in which the experimental treatment procedure is compared to a standard (control) treatment or procedure
Contraindicated: should not be used
Culture: test for infection or organisms that could cause infection
Double-Blind: a study in which neither the investigators nor the subjects know what drug the subject is receiving
Dysplasia: abnormal cells
Edema: swelling due to excess fluid in the tissues
Efficacy: effectiveness
Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG): a recording of the heart’s electrical activity
Electrodes: pieces of metal attached to wires
Electroencephalogram (EEG): a recording of the brain’s electrical activity
Endoscopy: a procedure in which a thin, flexible tube with a light at its end is passed through the mouth or rectum to allow inspection of the gastrointestinal tract
Esophagus: swallowing tube between throat and stomach
Failed therapy: subjects do not “fail therapies” but rather therapies fail to help subjects
Febrile: feverish
Fluorescein: a fluorescent dye that can be injected into an arm vein to help examination of the blood vessels inside the eye
Flushing: warmth and reddening of the skin
Hematoma: a bruise, a black-and-blue mark or lump caused by the escape of blood into the tissues
Hepatitis: liver inflammation
Heparin Lock: a needle placed in the arm with blood thinner to keep the blood from clotting
Hives: an itchy, bumpy skin rash
Hyperglycemia: high blood sugar
Hypertension: high blood pressure
Hypoglycemia: low blood sugar
Hypokalemia: low blood potassium
Hypotension: low blood pressure
Indwelling catheter: a thin, flexible plastic tube that remains in a vein or artery for hours or days
Infusion: slow injection of fluid into a vein
Intravenously: through a vein
Jaundice: yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes
Laparotomy: surgery to examine the abdominal organs
Lumbar puncture: spinal tap
Malaise: feeling “lousy”
Manometer: instrument for measuring pressure
Metabolism: chemical activity of the body; drug metabolism refers to chemical change of the drug by the body
Metastasized: cancer that has traveled from its origin to other parts of the body
MRI (magnetic resonance imaging): study of body structure by a magnetic field and radio waves
Monitor: check on; keep track of; watch carefully
Morbidity: undesired result or complication
Mortality: death
Mucositis: painful sores in the mouth
Myocardial infarction (MI): heart attack
Necrosis: death of tissue
Neurotransmitter: chemical messenger in the nervous system
Occlusion: blockage
Oncology: the study of tumors or cancer
Percutaneous: through the skin
Perfusate: washing solution
Peritoneal cavity: abdominal cavity
PET scan (positron emission tomography): a technique that “labels” active areas of the brain; it requires the injection of small amounts of radioactive tracers
Pharmacology of a drug: how your body handles this drug
Phlebitis: inflammation of a vein
Placebo: an inactive substance like a sugar pill; a fake drug
Plasma: the liquid portion of the blood
Pneumothorax: air inside the chest wall compressing the lung
PRN: as needed
Protocol: a plan of study; clinical research study
Random: by chance, like the flip of a coin
Receptors: molecules on or in cells that interact with hormones, neurotransmitters, drugs, etc.
Relapse: the return of a disease
Remission: lessening of the symptoms of a disease
Resect, resected: remove surgically
Retrospective Study: a study looking back over past experience
Sepsis: infection in the bloodstream
Serotonin: one of the chemicals that act as messengers in the nervous system
Triglyceride level: level of one of the types of fat in the blood
Ultrasound: examination using sound waves
Venipuncture: puncture of a vein
Void: urinate