

THE HEALTHCARE INTERPRETER

A Textbook for Advanced Medical Interpreting
Applied Ethics, Terminology and Medical Specializations

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Read This First: Important Information for You, the Interpreter | 1 |
| Acknowledgments | 12 |
| About the Author | 13 |
| Advisory | 14 |
| Guide to Exercises | 15 |
| Disclaimer | 16 |
| Guide to Advocacy | 17 |

CHAPTER 1 – ANESTHESIA **25**

| | |
|--|----|
| Preparation for Anesthesia Role Play | 26 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 46 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 1: Accuracy | 49 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 52 |
| Medical Terminology: The Human Body | 56 |

CHAPTER 2 – ENDOCRINOLOGY—PEDIATRIC **61**

| | |
|---|----|
| Pediatric Endocrinology Role Play | 62 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 76 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 2: Confidentiality | 82 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 83 |
| Medical Terminology: The Pituitary Gland | 86 |

CHAPTER 3 – HIV/AIDS **89**

| | |
|---|-----|
| General Medicine—HIV-positive and AIDS Care Role Play | 90 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 100 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 3: Impartiality | 107 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 109 |
| Medical Terminology: The Lymphatic System | 110 |

CHAPTER 4 – OBSTETRICS **113**

| | |
|---|-----|
| Obstetrics—Ectopic Pregnancy Role Play | 114 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 124 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 4: Respect | 127 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 130 |
| Medical Terminology: Ectopic and Normal Pregnancy | 132 |

CHAPTER 5 – ENDOCRINOLOGY—ADULT **135**

| | |
|--|-----|
| Adult Endocrinology Role Play | 136 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 142 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 5: Cultural Awareness | 147 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 150 |
| Medical Terminology: The Endocrine System | 152 |



| | |
|--|------------|
| CHAPTER 6 – NEUROLOGY | 155 |
| Brain Tumor Role Play | 156 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 163 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 6: Role Boundaries | 165 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 168 |
| Medical Terminology: The Brain and Brain Tumors | 178 |
| CHAPTER 7 – UROLOGY | 183 |
| Pediatric Urology and Genetics—Gender Identity Role Play | 184 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 196 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 7: Professionalism | 199 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 201 |
| Medical Terminology: The Male and the Female Genitourinary Systems | 210 |
| CHAPTER 8 – GYNECOLOGY | 213 |
| Gynecology Role Play | 214 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 220 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 8: Professional Development | 223 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 225 |
| Medical Terminology: The Uterus | 230 |
| CHAPTER 9 – RHEUMATOLOGY | 233 |
| Adult Arthritis Clinic Role Play | 234 |
| What’s Important to Know about this Chapter? | 238 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal 9: Advocacy | 239 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 242 |
| Medical Terminology: Bones and Joints | 248 |
| CHAPTER 10 – PHARMACOLOGY AND REFERRALS | 251 |
| Remote Interpreting Pharmacology and Referral Role Plays | 252 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 262 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal: Review of Standards (Part 1) | 265 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 270 |
| CHAPTER 11 – GENETICS COUNSELING | 275 |
| Prenatal Diagnosis and Genetics Counseling Role Play | 276 |
| What’s Important to Know About This Chapter? | 290 |
| Ethics and Standards: Goal: Review of Standards (Part 2) | 294 |
| Occupational Therapy for Interpreters | 297 |
| Medical Terminology: Prenatal Genetic Testing | 300 |
| APPENDICES | |
| Appendix 1: Resources for Medical Interpreters | 303 |
| Appendix 2: Language Access Resources | 308 |
| Appendix 3: Spanish-English and English-Spanish Medical Glossaries | 316 |
| Appendix 4: Medical Terms: A Study Guide | 361 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 375 |

Read this first:

Important information for you, the interpreter

Prepare yourself

Develop your skills as a medical interpreter and prepare for challenging encounters. Use this advanced textbook to boost your terminology, knowledge and decision-making skills. Coach yourself emotionally for the unexpected. Engage with the powerful role plays, practical exercises, readings and terminology lists; then immerse yourself in the extensive glossary.

Who should use this book?

Medical interpreters

Any medical interpreter of any language pair who has completed basic training (a minimum of 40 to 100 hours) can use this book. It supports seasoned hospital staff interpreters, bilingual employees who interpret and healthcare interpreters still new to the job.

Important points to consider:

- Any medical interpreter will find value in:
 - The drawings labeled in English (and Spanish).
 - The terminology lists with space for completion in the other working language.
 - The English glossary.
- Interpreters who interpret between Spanish and English will find translations for medical terms into Spanish.
- The book is helpful for both spoken- and signed-language interpreters. However, the author is a Spanish interpreter, and the role plays do not involve Deaf or hard-of-hearing patients.¹
- While the focus is on U.S. healthcare, most of the problems and challenges found in this book apply to medical interpreting in almost any country, especially industrialized nations with complex healthcare systems.

Instructors of medical interpreting

Interpreter trainers and university or college instructors who teach medical interpreting (especially beyond entry level) will also find this book of value. It can be used by instructors:

- As a core textbook.

¹ Note that in healthcare and other settings, spoken language interpreters may be called to work with a signed-language interpreter (or team) to interpret for members of a family with complex language needs (for example, a monolingual Spanish-speaking parent and a Deaf child who communicates in American Sign Language).

- As a reference book.
- As a source of ideas, scenarios and exercises for student practice.
- As a repository of some of the richest, most realistic role plays in the field.

The extensive appended glossary of English and English-Spanish medical terms is also valuable. More specific guidance for instructors on how to use this book is provided below.

Can I study this book by myself?

The Healthcare Interpreter is designed for class use or self-study. If you have a fellow interpreter as a “study buddy,” this book will be a wonderful resource to help both of you study and practice together.

What is in this book?

Each chapter in this textbook focuses on a medical specialization. It launches with a role play and an analysis of the linguistic and cultural challenges; then the chapter takes a closer look at tough ethical decisions for interpreters and dives into practical activities and exercises. Each chapter concludes with a specialization-specific diagram with labeled medical terms, a blank version of the diagram where interpreters can fill in the missing words in both (or all) their working languages and a list of those terms.

An advanced glossary is included in Appendix 3.

Goals for the book

The primary goal for this book is to prepare healthcare interpreters for what they will face when they work in hospitals and clinics. In this way, they can become more accurate, confident and successful in the profession.

Most interpreters receive inadequate mentoring, shadowing, vetting and the kind of advanced training they need to work in hospitals and clinics. As a result, they are not adequately prepared for challenging encounters or advanced terminology and may freeze in the moment. To interpret hard news (for example, when a doctor informs parents that their child is dying) can come as a brutal shock for many interpreters. Some withdraw from a session or the profession because they cannot cope with such challenges.

This textbook supports the professional development and continuing education of professional interpreters.

Just as important, the author seeks to inspire interpreters to become impassioned contributors to actions that support patient safety, quality of care, health equity and social justice.

Finally, this guide can provide a helpful platform to discuss how language and communication barriers play out in health inequity. The author’s cherished long-term goal is to contribute to meaningful strategies for change that can help to reduce, and perhaps one day eliminate, health disparities rooted in language barriers.

Most chapters also address cultural competence, language access and advocacy.

Anesthesia

1

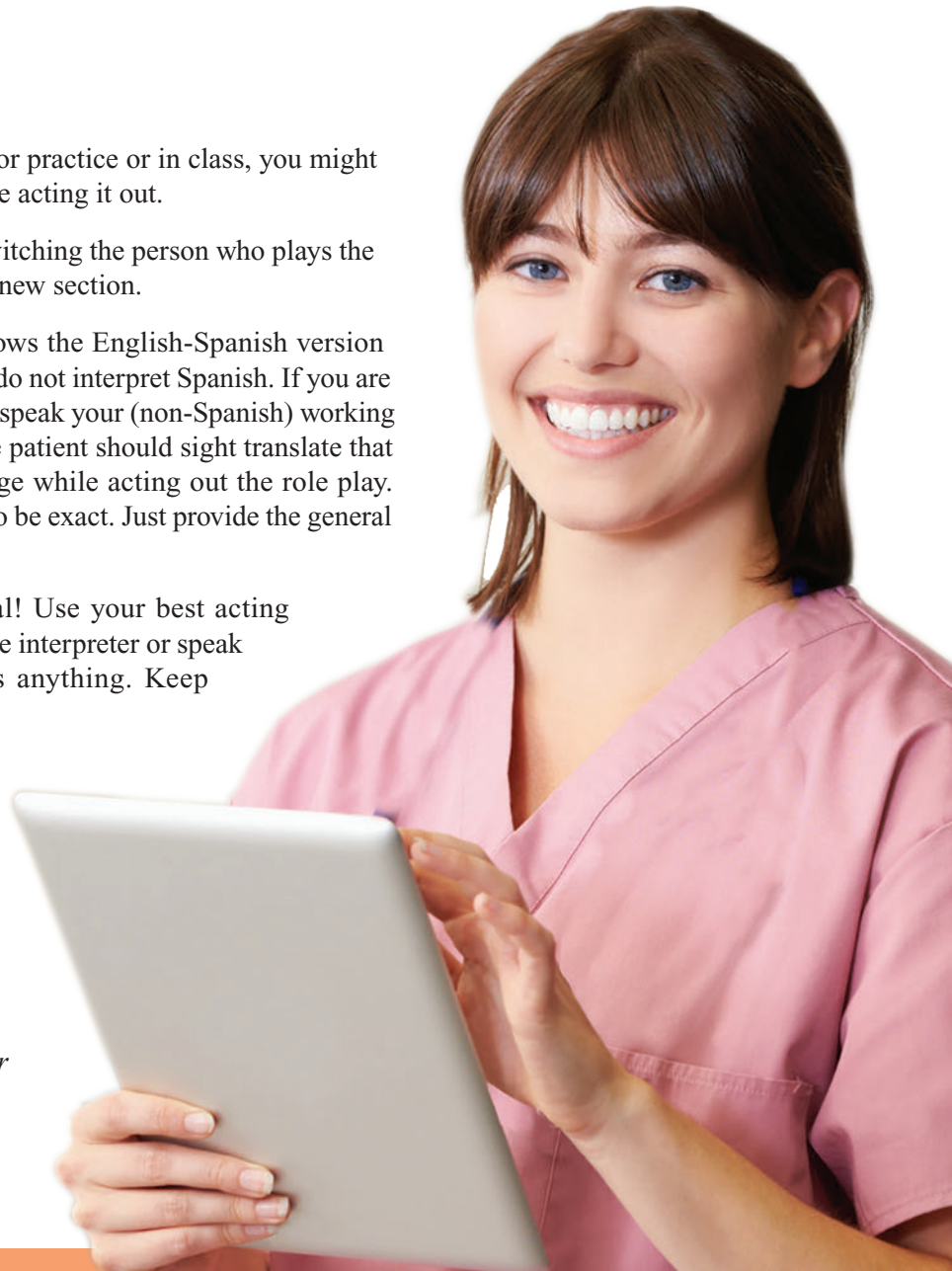
Advisory

This chapter involves a visit to a medical office and preparation for anesthesia prior to surgery.

Notes for acting out role plays

1. If you are acting out this role play for practice or in class, you might wish to read the role play first before acting it out.
2. This is a long role play. Consider switching the person who plays the interpreter at the beginning of each new section.
3. The English-only version that follows the English-Spanish version should be used for role players who do not interpret Spanish. If you are working with other individuals who speak your (non-Spanish) working languages, the person who plays the patient should sight translate that text into the other working language while acting out the role play. (The sight translation doesn't need to be exact. Just provide the general meaning.)
4. Remember, keep the role play real! Use your best acting skills. Don't interrupt. Don't help the interpreter or speak too slowly. Don't stop to discuss anything. Keep discussions for the end!

Note: *This patient is a 68-year-old woman, originally from Cuba (in the English-Spanish version of the role play). She has come for a presurgical checkup to clear her for anesthesia. The interpreter walks into the room where the nurse practitioner and patient are already seated.*



Preparation for anesthesia role play (English-Spanish)

PART 1

INTERPRETER: Good morning. My name is _____. I'm your interpreter. I'd like to let you know that everything you say will be interpreted, and everything will be kept confidential. Please speak directly to each other, not to me, and pause when I make this signal (*raises hand*) so I can interpret.

INTERPRETER: Buenos días. Me llamo _____. Soy su intérprete. Quisiera informarle que yo interpretaré todo lo que usted dice y que todo será confidencial. Por favor diríjense directamente el uno al otro. Cuando yo le hago esta señal (*raises hand*), por favor haga una pausa y permítame interpretar.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Good morning, please have a seat.

PATIENT: Buenos días.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Hello, Asteria Ruiz? Buenas tardes, my name is Jill.

PATIENT: ¿Buenas tardes?

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Oh, well, that's the only Spanish I know, so I have a translator here to help.

PATIENT: Muy bien, doctora, muy bien.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Please have a seat, Mrs. Ruiz. So, as I was saying, I'm a nurse practitioner here in the anesthesia department and my job is to make sure everything is safe to go ahead and give you anesthesia for your surgery.

PATIENT: Muy bien, muy bien, pero llámeme Asteria. Cuando me dice "Sra. Ruiz," me hace sentir muy vieja.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Very good, Asteria. Oh, I'm sorry. Can you wait just one minute, I left part of your file at another desk, I'll be right back.

PATIENT: ¡Por supuesto, doctora! (*Nurse practitioner leaves the room; patient turns to interpreter.*) Good morning. ¡Oh! ¿Usted habla español, ¿verdad? Y usted es enfermera?

INTERPRETER: No, yo soy intérprete.

PATIENT: ¿Y qué trabajo hace usted?

INTERPRETER: Yo interpreto. Como la enfermera no habla español y usted no habla inglés, yo les voy a servir como intérprete.

PATIENT: ¿Y es lo único que hace en todo el día? ¿Trabaja aquí todo el día, así?

INTERPRETER: Sí. Éste es mi trabajo. (*Nurse practitioner enters the room.*)

Preparation for anesthesia role play (English only)

Note: Feel free to change the name of the patient to fit the language you interpret to from English.

PART 1

INTERPRETER: Good morning. My name is _____. I'm your interpreter. I'd like to let you know that everything you say will be interpreted, and everything will be kept confidential. Please speak directly to each other, not to me, and pause when I make this signal (*raises hand*) so I can interpret.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Good morning, please have a seat.

PATIENT: Good morning.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Hello, Asteria Ruiz? (*Substitute any name that you choose for the patient's name.*) Good afternoon, my name is Jill. I don't speak your language, so I have a translator here to help.

PATIENT: Very good, doctor, that's very good.

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Please have a seat, Mrs. _____. So, as I was saying, I'm a nurse practitioner here in the anesthesia department and my job is to make sure everything is safe to go ahead and give you anesthesia for your surgery.

PATIENT: Very good, very good, but call me Asteria. (*Substitute the patient name that you decided on.*) When you call me Mrs. _____, it makes me feel so old!

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Very good, Asteria. Oh, I'm sorry. Can you wait just one minute, I left part of your file at another desk, I'll be right back.

PATIENT: Of course, doctor! (*Nurse practitioner leaves the room; patient turns to interpreter.*) Good morning. Oh! You speak _____, right? Are you a nurse?

INTERPRETER: I'm an interpreter.

PATIENT: And what's your job? What do you do?

INTERPRETER: I interpret. Since the nurse doesn't speak _____, and you don't speak English, I'll interpret for you.

PATIENT: And is that all you do all day? You work here the whole day doing that?

INTERPRETER: Yes, this is my job. (*Nurse practitioner enters the room.*)

PATIENT: (*to the nurse practitioner*) Can I ask a question?

NURSE PRACTITIONER: Sure, go ahead.

Endocrinology—Adult 5

Advisory

This chapter involves information about endocrine and hormonal conditions and infertility.

The patient is a young married woman who is accompanied by her husband. The doctor knows a little Spanish (or it could be another language spoken by the patient) and wants to practice speaking it. The doctor is also mixing up English and the other language in the same sentences. This can be one of the more frustrating situations for an interpreter, because the doctor interferes with the role of the interpreter. It is also just hard to interpret when the speaker is switching between two languages and committing many mistakes, whether the speaker is the provider or the patient. As discussed in the previous chapter, such practices can undermine clear communication, quality care and patient safety.

Note: This is a shorter role play, so it is not divided into three parts. Shorter role plays in this book will not be divided into smaller sections.



What's important to know about this chapter?

Overview

Endocrinology is the medical specialty that deals with the endocrine system. This system includes glands in different parts of the body that produce hormones influencing many organs and functions in the body. For example, they influence development, growth, organ and tissue function, sleep, mood, sexual libido, secondary sexual characteristics, movement, reproduction, thirst, sweat, urination and metabolism.

People with diabetes or thyroid conditions often see endocrinologists. In this dialogue, the patient is taking medicine to shrink a benign tumor in the pituitary gland. Her treatment is causing a reduction in levels of hormones that affect fertility and conception. The patient is having difficulty becoming pregnant. Vocabulary regarding menstruation and conception are part of the dialogue.

Calling time

When is a week seven days? When is it eight days? In U.S. English, a week is seven days. A little farther south, a week can refer to eight days. In different languages, we can say “a week” differently. If, for example, it's Thursday, a week away in U.S. English can be “in a week” or “next Thursday” but not “in eight days,” as it could be in Spanish and some other languages. “In 15 days” (two weeks away) in one language can mean “in 15 days” in English, but it can also mean “in 14 days,” “in two weeks,” “in two Thursdays,” or “the Thursday after next.” In the United States, many native speakers don't even know what a “fortnight” is (two weeks).

In some places, people use calendars different from the U.S. calendar, which is the Gregorian calendar (also called the Western calendar and the Christian

calendar). For example, if you ever translate an Ethiopian birth certificate, beware: due to the differences between the Western and Ethiopian calendars, your translation could make that person sound several years older than is really the case. The year in an Islamic calendar might be about 622 years different from the Western calendar!

Are there other differences in the way people around the world refer to periods such as a week, a month or the day of rest? For example, on what day does a week generally start? Does a day begin at sunrise? Or at the disappearance of the last star?

Time constraints

Depending on work conditions and policies, an interpreter might have to leave an appointment before it is over. It can be hard to do so if you've already sensed communication problems. In this dialogue, the provider has already missed important health information by not working effectively with the interpreter. Now the provider is stepping out to consult a senior physician right when the interpreter has to leave.

If you are under time constraints, announce at the beginning of the session what time you have to leave. If that time arrives, is there a coordinator or dispatcher you can ask for an extension or a replacement? Is there telephone or video interpreting available? If you have to leave early and you are uncomfortable doing so, try to provide options. Offering two or three options is ideal.

In dire circumstances, weigh the consequences for everyone involved if you leave (including the consequences for you), and then make your decision to stay or go.

Spanish-English medical glossary

Glosario médico Español-Inglés

A

- a salvo** safe, out of danger
- aborto** miscarriage, abortion
- aborto espontáneo** miscarriage, spontaneous abortion
- aborto médico** medical abortion
- aborto provocado** medical abortion
- abrazar** hug
- absceso** abscess
- abuja** (*reg.*, **aguja**) needle
- ácaros** dust mites
- accidente cerebral** stroke, cerebral accident
- accidente cerebrovascular (embolia)** cerebrovascular accident (stroke)
- accidente cerebrovascular hemorrágico** hemorrhagic stroke, hemorrhagic cerebrovascular accident
- acidez** acidity, heartburn, stomach acid
- ácido desoxirribonucleico (ADN)** deoxyribonucleic acid DNA
- acogido, familia de** foster family
- acostado** lying down, prostrate
- acta de nacimiento** birth certificate
- ad hoc** ad hoc
- adenoides** (*reg.*) adenoids, tonsils
- adenoma** adenoma
- adherencia** adhesion
- adiposo** adipose
- ADN** DNA
- adrenoleucodistrofia (ALD)** adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD)
- afección preexistente** preexisting condition
- aféresis (plasmaféresis)** apheresis (plasmapheresis)
- agitado** agitated, nervous, restless, anxious
- agitar** shake, agitate, stir
- agriera** (*COL*) heartburn
- aguras** (*MEX*) heartburn
- aguadito** floppy, lazy, week
- aguja** needle
- alambre** lead, wire, sensor, electrode
- alcohol** alcohol
- ALD (adrenoleucodistrofia)** ALD (adrenoleukodystrophy)
- alergia** allergy
- alergias de la temporada** seasonal allergies, hay fever
- alfafetoproteína (AFP)** alpha fetoprotein (AFP)
- aliento** breath
- alimentación** diet, food, feeding
- llevar un régimen de alimentación** to be on a diet
- bolo alimenticio** bolus feed
- alimentación insuficiente** malnutrition
- alimento** food, diet, feed
- alimento alto en fibra** high-fiber diet
- alimento bajo en potasio** low-potassium diet
- alimento balanceado** balanced diet
- alimento blando** soft diet
- alimento equilibrado** balanced diet
- alimento libre de sodio** sodium-free diet
- carencia alimenticia o nutritiva** dietary deficiency
- deficiencia alimenticia o nutritiva** dietary deficiency
- aliviar** relieve, alleviate
- alivio** relief
- amamantar** breastfeed
- amígdala (brain structure; vea amígdalas)** amygdala
- amígdalas** tonsils, adenoids
- amígdalas paletinas** palatine tonsils
- amigdalectomía** tonsillectomy
- amigdalitis** tonsillitis
- amigdaloadenoidectomía** adenotonsillectomy
- aminoácido** amino acid
- amniocentesis** amniocentesis
- amplitud** width, range limit
- amplitud de movimiento** range of motion
- ampolla** blister
- ampolleta** vial
- anafiláctico** anaphylactic
- shock anafiláctico** anaphylactic shock
- anafilaxia** anaphylaxis
- análisis** analysis, test
- análisis de laboratorio** lab tests
- andrógenos** androgens
- anemia** anemia
- anemia aplásica** aplastic anemia
- anemia de Fanconi (anemia aplásica)** (aplastic anemia) Fanconi anemia
- anemia Diamond Blackfan** Diamond Blackfan anemia
- anemia falciforme o de las células falciformes** sickle cell anemia

anemia hipoplásica congénita congenital hypoplastic anemia
anemia megaloblástica anemia megoblastic
anemia perniciosa pernicious anemia
aneurisma aneurysm
aneurisma cerebral cerebral aneurysm
angina (*vea anginas*) angina
angina de pecho angina pectoris
anginas tonsils
inflamación de las anginas tonsillitis
angiografía coronaria coronary angiography, cardiac catheterization
angiograma coronario coronary angiogram, cardiac catheterization
ano anus
anteojos glasses (eye)
anticoagulantes anticoagulants, blood thinners
anticuerpo antibody
anticuerpos antiplaquetarios antiplatelet antibodies
antígeno antigen
antigüedad seniority
antiplaquetarios blood thinners, antiplatelet drugs
antirechazo antirejection
antiretroviral antiretroviral
antirreflujo antireflux
apapachar to hug, to cuddle
apapacho hug
apestar stink, smell bad
aplásica aplastic
aplastar smash, crush
apnea apnea
apóinmen (cita) (*reg.*) apoingmen
apoplejía apoplexy
apósito dressing, bandages
apretar squeeze
arrancar jump-start (heart), start
arrecho angry, rabidly angry (*VEN, C.A.*) horny (*PER*)
arriba de la boca above the mouth
arriesgar risk
arritmia arrhythmia
arrojar vomit, throw up, upchuck, spit up, yack
articulación joint
artritis arthritis
artritis reumatoide rheumatoid arthritis
artritis reumatoide juvenil juvenile rheumatoid arthritis
asistencia care, attention
asistencia deshumanizada inhumane care
asistente de médico physician's assistant (PA)
asistente médico medical assistant (MA)
asma asthma
ataque de asma asthma attack
aspiración aspiration
aspiración (biopsia, prueba) de médula ósea bone marrow biopsy (aspiration, test)
aspiración con aguja fina fine needle aspiration

aspirar to breathe in, to vacuum, to suction
ataque seizure, attack, convulsion
ataque al corazón heart attack
ataque cardíaco heart attack
ataque cerebrovascular, ACV brain attack
 cerebrovascular attack, stroke
ataque cerebral (*vea infarcto*) brain attack, seizure, brain seizure
ataque cerebral hemorrágico cerebrovascular hemorrhage, hemorrhagic brain attack
ataque cerebral isquémico transitorio transient ischemic brain attack (ministroke)
ataque de pánico panic attack
ataque isquémico transitorio (AIT) transient ischemic attacks (TIAs)
atarantado lightheaded, dizzy, out of it
atención attention, care
atención deshumanizada inhumane care
aterronado lumpy
atole atole (thick, corn-based drink of Mesoamerican origin)
atresia atresia
atresia pulmonar pulmonary atresia
atresia tricuspídea tricuspid atresia
atrofia atrophy
aturdido lightheaded, dizzy, out of it
audición hearing
audiología audiology
auditivo auditory
canal auditivo auditory canal
nervio auditivo auditory nerve
aurícula atrium
autismo autism
trastorno del espectro autista autism spectrum disorder
autorización authorization
autosoma autosome
autosómico autosomal
auxiliar de enfermería nursing assistant
axila axilla
axón axon
azucar sugar, glucose, blood sugar

B

baipás, derivación bypass
bajar poco a poco (la dosis de una medicina) taper, reduce
balance balance, balance sheet
balancearse to balance, to weigh
balanza (*vea báscula*) scale, scales
bálsamo balm
bálsamo labial lip balm
bálsamo para dermatitis de pañal butt balm, diaper rash cream or balm
báscula scale, scales

Appendix 4

Medical terms: A study guide

Note: Most interpreters in hospitals should be prepared to interpret the terms in the following list. The purpose of the list is twofold. Interpreters can test themselves to see if they know the terms in their other working language(s). Interpreters can also, if they are not Spanish-speaking, research and write down the translation of each term in their non-English working language(s).

A

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| abortion | alcohol | antiphospholipid antibody syndrome (APLS) |
| abscess | alcohol wipe | antiplatelet antibodies |
| absolute neutrophil count (ANC) | alcoholic | antiplatelet drugs |
| absolutely | alcoholism | antireflux |
| accuracy | fetal alcohol syndrome | antirejection |
| acid | ALD (adrenoleukodystrophy) | antiretroviral |
| acid indigestion | alleviate | anus |
| acid reflux | almost sure (of a test result) | anxiety |
| acidity | alopecia | anxious |
| acoustic | alpha fetoprotein (AFP) | Apgar test |
| acquired immunity | ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) | apheresis (plasmapheresis) |
| acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) | ambiguous genitalia | aplastic anemia |
| acute immunity | amino acid | APLS (antiphospholipid antibody syndrome) |
| acute lymphoblastic leukemia (Hodgkin disease) | amniocentesis | apnea |
| ad hoc | amoeba | apoplexy |
| Adam's apple | amount | appointment |
| adenoids (<i>see tonsils</i>) | amygdala (structure in brain) | arm |
| adenoma | amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) | armpit |
| adenotonsillectomy | anal sex | arrrhythmia |
| adhesion | analysis | arterial stenosis |
| adhesive | anaphylactic shock | arteriosclerosis (<i>see atherosclerosis</i>) |
| adipose | anaphylaxis | arteriovenous malformation (AVM) |
| adipose tissue | androgens | artery |
| adoptive family | anemia | arthritis |
| adrenal gland | aplastic anemia | juvenile rheumatoid arthritis |
| adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD) | Diamond Blackfan anemia (congenital hypoplastic anemia) | rheumatoid arthritis |
| advanced practice nurse | Fanconi anemia (aplastic anemia) | aspiration |
| aerosol | megaloblastic anemia | bone marrow aspiration |
| AFP (alpha fetoprotein) | sickle cell anemia | fine needle aspiration assault |
| AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) | aneurysm | asshole (<i>see butt</i>) |
| airborne | anger | asthma |
| airborne disease | angina | asthma attack |
| airborne precaution | angioplasty anguish | astigmatism |
| airway | antibacterial | at risk |
| obstructed airway | antibody | atherosclerosis (<i>see arteriosclerosis</i>) |
| | anticoagulants | athlete's foot (tinea) |
| | antifungal | atria |
| | antigen | atrium |