Curriculum Development
Centers Program

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Component 3-Terminology in
Healthcare and Public Health Settings

Unit 1-Understanding Medical Words
Lecture 1a- Word Roots

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Medical Terminology

- Studying medical terminology is like learning a new language
- Basic rules for building terms will help you both build and translate many different words
- You must be able to put words together or build words from their parts
    - Like putting together the pieces of a puzzle

Understanding Medical Terms

- It is impossible to memorize all of the thousands of medical terms
- You can figure out the meaning of many different words by analyzing the word parts
    - Word roots
    - Prefixes
    - Suffixes
    - Combining forms

Basic Word Parts

- **Word root** is the general meaning of the term

- **Prefixes** are added to the beginning of the word

- **Suffixes** are added to the ending of the word

- **Combining vowels** connect other word parts

Basic Word Parts

Word Part   **Example (Meaning)**

- Word root   • *cardi*ology (study of the heart)
- Prefix   • *tachy*cardia (condition of a fast heart)
- Suffix   • card*itis* (inflammation of the heart)
- Combining   • cardi*o*my*o*pathy (disease of the heart
  form   muscle)

Word Root

- **Core** part of the term
- Provides general meaning of the word
- Usually gives a body part
  - oste = bone
  - cardi = heart
  - rhino = nose

Combining Vowels

- Make it possible to pronounce long terms
- Usually an "o"
- Combine two word parts:
  - Between two word roots
  - Between word root and suffix

Combining Vowel Rules

- Between word root and suffix
- If the suffix begins with a **vowel**
  - **Do not** use a combining vowel
  - Arthritis (not arthroitis)
- If the suffix begins with a **consonant**
  - **Use** a combining vowel
  - Arthroscope (not arthrscope)

Combining Vowel Rules

- Combining vowel is typically kept between two word roots
- Even if the second word root begins with a vowel
  - Gastroenteritis (not gastrenteritis)

Combining Form

- Typically used to write word roots
- Also uses the word root / combining vowel format
- Examples:
  - cardi/o
  - hepat/o
  - gastr/o

Examples of Combining Forms

- arthr/o – joint
- cardi/o – heart
- dermat/o – skin
- enter/o – small intestine
- gastr/o – stomach
- hemat/o – blood

- nephr/o – kidney
- neur/o – nerve
- ot/o – ear
- pulmon/o – lung
- rhin/o – nose
- ur/o – urine, urinary system

For additional information on content covered in this unit, please visit:

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/medicalwords/