

HUMOR IN MEDICINE

The Doctor's Dictionary

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Ambrose Bierce was an American writer and satirist who was known for his incisive wit. In 1911, Bierce published *The Devil's Dictionary*,¹ a compendium of clever, sometimes scathing definitions that commented on his times. Although his dictionary primarily consists of nonmedical words, Bierce tossed a few barbs at the medical profession:

Diaphragm *n.* A muscular partition separating disorders of the chest from disorders of the bowels.

Disease *n.* Nature's endowment to medical schools.

After spending a weekend going through Bierce's dictionary, I thought I would coin some alternative definitions of my own.

acute *adj.* Sudden, without warning. As in the pain one gets when approached by a drug rep at the end of a busy day.

aphorism *n.* An adage or wise saying, as in, "Half a nurse is better than none," or "A gallbladder in the hand is worth 2 on the floor."

atrophy *v.* To become smaller with disuse. As in the state of mind brought on by successfully matching in the residency of one's choice.

circumcision *n.* Elective surgical procedure that has continued into modern times so adolescent males can shower at school in peace.

clinical practice guidelines *n.* *Cliff's Notes* for doctors.

deferred *v.* Refers to part of the physical exam that was not done on admission. It is not likely to be done after admission either.

drug *n.* A substance that when given to a patient produces the side effect you forgot to mention.

fetal monitor *n.* Electronic device that allows obstetricians to avoid bodily fluids for as long as possible.

fever *n.* A change in body temperature that decreases a doctor's sleep but increases his income.

foreign body *n.* Any object smaller than a toaster that is left in the vicinity of a young child for less than 2 minutes.

heart *n.* (orthopedic definition) A muscular organ that has the sole purpose of pumping antibiotics to the bones.

hemorrhoids *n.* The body's revenge for a high-fat diet.

informed consent *n.* The only thing that stands between a surgeon and his 9-iron.

nonpaying patients *n.* Relatives.

not really *n phr.* Expression used to dodge questions on rounds (usually when a resident forgot to do something). *Attending:* Was the patient anemic? *Resident:* Not really.

oriented x three *adj phr.* Less confused than your physician.

penis *n.* See vagina.

pimping *v.* A popular form of entertainment in medical centers, occasionally interrupted by teaching.

push, push, push *v phr.* What obstetrics nurses tell women in labor to do right before those women strangle their husbands.

rectal *n.* Part of the physical exam that illustrates the true meaning of the Yuletide maxim, "It is better to give than to receive."

scut *n.* Chores that have hypertrophied.

tenure *n.* Status granted by a medical center that guarantees employment until death or until the center is purchased by a for-profit hospital chain, whichever comes first.

unethical researcher *n.* Anyone who gets more grants than you do.

vagina *n.* Aren't you a little old to be looking up words like this?

REFERENCE

1. Bierce A. *The devil's dictionary*. New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1911.

The second edition of Dr Bennett's book, The Best of Medical Humor, was published in February 1997. Correspondence should be addressed to Howard J. Bennett, MD, 9 Avalon Court, Bethesda, MD 20816.