

# Medical jargon is source of confusion for non-physicians

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In work published in the *Journal of Hospital Medicine*, University of Minnesota Medical School researchers examined whether the general public understands the medical jargon that physicians typically use in their introductions to patients. They found specialty names and seniority titles are sources of misunderstanding.

"Jargon is pervasive in medicine and the opportunity for misunderstanding due to this terminology begins the instant that physicians introduce themselves to patients," said Emily Hause, MD, MPH, a pediatric rheumatology fellow at the U of M Medical School.

"We found that most people can't define specialty names nor correctly rank medical seniority titles. Physicians should describe their [medical specialty](#) and role on the patient's care team in plain language to help reduce this source of potential confusion."

Volunteer participants at the 2021 Minnesota State Fair completed an electronic survey that measured their knowledge of medical specialties and titles. Of the 14 specialties included in the survey, six specialties were correctly defined by less than half of the respondents:

- Neonatologists: 48%
- Pulmonologists: 43%
- Hospitalists: 31%
- Intensivists: 29%
- Internists: 21%
- Nephrologists: 20%

When asked to rank medical roles, only 12% of participants correctly placed these titles in order: [medical student](#), intern, senior resident, fellow and attending.

Further research is suggested to survey knowledge on additional specialties and obtain more demographic information.

**More information:** Emily Hause et al, What's in a name? Laypeople's understanding of medical roles and titles, *Journal of Hospital Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/jhm.12971](https://doi.org/10.1002/jhm.12971)

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