Editorial

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Editor

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

At the time Hamlet was written, Shakespeare had 20,000 words available to express all through the English language. When President Lincoln made his famous, concise Gettysburg address, there were 114,000 English words from which to choose. Today we can find 600,000 words defined in Webster's Dictionary. When we add medical terminology and accepted words from other languages, our options have expanded forty fold since Shakespeare's time.

The late Dr. Harry L. Arnold, HMJ Editor for 41 years, was expert at using proper vocabulary. Some of my fondest controversial medical discussions appeared in print between Harry and the late NYU Professor of Dermatology, Dr. Morris Leider. It was Morris who called me the Semitic Semanticist (considered an honor, coming from him).

To communicate effectively, we often simplify our spoken language through idioms and contractions. So, instead of saying, "It is not efficacious to indoctrinate a superannuated canine with innovative maneuvers", we remark, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." American shorthand speech reduces the phrase, "we need to dimensionalize this management initiative" to "Let's make a plan".

Simply put, let's make a plan to:

1. Keep sentences short
2. Pick simple words over complex ones
3. Choose familiar words instead of obscure ones
4. Avoid unnecessary words
5. Put action in our verbs
6. Write the way we talk
7. Use terminology that our patients can picture
8. Tie in with our patients' experience
9. Make full use of a variety of words
10. Write and speak to express, not impress

References
3. Wong, L.L. et al "Liver Transplantation in Hawaii: The Initial Five Years"