



Unit V Some of the Most Frequent Mistakes Made by Doctors Speaking in English

What Can Go Wrong ... Nightmares That Don't Come True

What? A section on nightmares? As in bad dreams that make you wake up in the middle of the night? Or a section on things that could go wrong in life, i.e., buying a used car on the black market? Or both? Or neither?

We could just hear the reader mumbling these questions when scanning through the table of contents just as his/her finger hovers over this title. Yes, this is indeed a section only for the brave, only for those who have actually made it all the way here to this page, to face the jungle out there. The jungle being the challenge of *preparing and delivering a presentation in English when one is just a simple mortal*.

We have decided to write about this topic because we ourselves used to be the ones with nightmares. There were so many things that could go wrong when dealing with medical terminology in English, that the mathematical concept of infinity seemed ridiculously small.

In this section we try and share with you what we have found to be some of the great hurdles in medical English. There are many things that certainly *can* go wrong when one is asked to give a lecture in English. This is by no means an exhaustive account from a comprehensive risk assessment study. Rather it is just a way of passing on what we have learnt from our own experience in the fascinating world of international medical conferences.

As mentioned before in this book, many doctors did not have a lucky day when Mother Nature handed out predisposing factors for success at giving presentations in English. Firstly, they did not live in a country where English is part of day-to-day life. Secondly, they were never taught languages properly at school.

When preparing and actually delivering a presentation in English at an international medical conference, a series of basic issues should be taken into account. We have grouped them into three danger zones, in the hope that their classification will make them shrink or at least become less of a problem. The categories are the following:

1. English grammar: they all say it's so simple and yet nobody gets it right.
2. Misnomers and false friends.
3. Common basic mistakes.