



Unit VI Latin and Greek Terminology

Introduction

Latin and Greek terminology is another obstacle to be overcome on our way to becoming fluent in medical English. Romance-language speakers (Spanish, French, Italian ...) are undoubtedly at an advantage, although this advantage in theory can become a great drawback in terms of pronunciation and, particularly, in the use of the plural forms of Latin and Greek.

This unit is made up of a set of somewhat intuitive plural rules, several exercises containing Latin and Greek terminology, and finally a double list of Latin and Greek terms, the first one consisting of terms without English equivalents and the second one made up of terms with English equivalents.

Plural Rules

It is obvious that it is far from our intention to replace medical dictionaries and Latin or Greek text books. Conversely, this unit is aimed at giving some tips related to Latin and Greek terminology that can provide an intuitive approach to this challenging topic.

Our first piece of advice on this subject is that whenever you write a Latin or Greek word, firstly, check its spelling and, secondly, if the word you want to write is a plural one, never make it up. Although guessing the plural form could be acceptable as an exercise in itself, double-check the word by looking it up in a medical dictionary.

The following plural rules are useful to at least give us self-confidence in the use of usual Latin or Greek terms such as *metastasis* – *metastases*, *pelvis* – *pelves*, *bronchus* – *bronchi*, etc ...

Some overseas doctors do think that *metastasis* and *metastases* are equivalent terms, and they are absolutely wrong; the difference between a unique liver metastasis and multiple liver metastases is so obvious that no additional comments are needed.

There are many Latin and Greek words whose singular forms are almost never used as well as Latin and Greek terms whose plural forms are seldom said or written. Let us think, for example, about the singular form of