

# Letter to the editor: Uterectomy

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During anatomy class at medical schools it is explained that the term for procedure of surgical removal of the uterus is Hysterectomy. Female (as well as male students for that matter) students can and are offended by the sexist origin of this nomenclature. As young women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (MRG and NM), we are convinced that there is no place in the current medical field for such an archaic term and we call upon the medical community to change it to a more suitable, appropriate name such as Uterectomy.

Hysterectomy is the term given to the procedure where a woman's uterus is removed. This procedure has a long, bloody history, with the first documented abdominal hysterectomy occurring in 1843 [1]; the outcome, unfortunately, was death due to wrong diagnosis. The death rates were high for such a procedure at the time (70%), which is not surprising due to the lack of antibiotics or anesthesia. Women often died of hemorrhage, infections and/or exhaustion [1].

Hysteria was once believed to be a mental disorder solely attributable to women [2] characterized by extreme excitability and emotional overflow. Consequently, doctors at the time 'cured' the disease by removing the source, which was, at the time, believed to be the uterus. Thus the word for Hysterectomy came about around 1879, with 'Hyster' referring to the womb.

Since quite some time, it is evident that Hysteria is a mental disorder not only found in women. The previously believed assumption that the uterus was the source of 'uncontrollable emotions' is extremely sexist, old-fashioned and inappropriate. We believe that this term should be completely and immediately removed from the medical nomenclature and vocabulary.

The male equivalent procedure is the Vasectomy, whose etymology is clear: it comes from the vas deferens; the tubes which are severed during the surgery. This word has no sexist implications; therefore, we believe that neither should the female procedure.

We propose a term such as Uterectomy would be much more appropriate for today's society. This term has occasionally been used in the medical literature, with PubMed having 17 hits (Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2018) but this is dwarfed by the +44,000 hits for Hysterectomy (accessed on the same day). Strangely enough, the term Uterectomy is mostly used to describe the procedure for non-human animals. Furthermore, the use of the term Uterectomy would also facilitate the comprehension of patients with no medical background as the words 'uterus' and 'Uterectomy' are similar in their origin.

It is understood that changing of medical vocabulary is an arduous process, nevertheless it is a necessary and inevitable step that must be taken better sooner than later. Furthermore, history has demonstrated that the changing of nomenclature is possible, such as Wegener's disease being changed to granulomatosis with polyangiitis. This was due to Dr. Wegener's history as a follower of the Nazi regime and his experiments performed on the imprisoned Jewish population [3]. Terms like these only aid in the remembering of past mistakes/false assumptions and the related suffering of millions. The hidden meaning between Hysterectomy supports the prehistoric notion that females let their emotion take the better of themselves and that they are anatomically predisposed to it.

We are of the opinion that the term Hysterectomy needs to be changed. Our aim is to reduce the 303 hits on SNOMED (www.snomed.org; Accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2018), the (self-acclaimed) most comprehensive and precise clinical health terminology product in the world, for the search term "hysterectomy" to 0.

## References

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