



## LATIN IN MEDICAL PRESCRIPTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper briefly discusses the history and significance of Latin language and focuses on its use in prescription writing. Latin continues to be extensively used by physicians and pharmacists. It is a commonly understood language of medical communication all around the world. It has maintained a balance in understanding the prescription and dispensing medication for patients. Well-known and utilized in the history, despite being a dead language it holds a notable and irreplaceable position in the field of medicine.

### KEYWORDS

Latin, Prescription, Medical terminology, pharmacists, pharmacology.

### INTRODUCTION

Latin language (Lingua Latina) is regarded as a dead language; however, Latin has had a significant impact on modern medicine especially pharmaceutical sciences. Embracing Latin as a common language for

describing the anatomy of human body, medical disorders and different processes has helped countless researchers, physicians and pharmacists communicate effectively. Celsus, the greatest Roman physician, is

credited with inventing Latin medical terminology. When he wrote *De Medicina* in the beginning of 1st century AD, he encountered a situation where most of the Greek terms didn't have Latin equivalents because of which he had to trade in Greek terminologies directly into Latin language e.g. *stomachus* and *brachium* (1). Numerous words were utilized to denote medicine in Latin such as *remedium*, *medicina*, *medicamen*, *medicamentum*, and all of them come from the verb *medicor*, *-ari*, *-atus sum* (meaning 'to heal'). The word *medicamen* mainly surfaced in poetry, in contrast, the word *medicina* was used both for the study of healing and drugs (2). Abu Ibn Sina, generally recognized by his Latin name *Avicenna*, regarded as Prince of Physicians wrote the most influential book in the history of medicine called "*Al Qanun fi al Tib*" or "*The Canon of Medicine*", it's a medical encyclopedia comprising of 5 books and the 5th volume providing information about compound drugs. (3)(4)

In the 12th century Gerard of Cremona a medieval scholar translated *Qanun* in Latin, *Canon medicinae*. The *Canon* was published in 15 Latin editions and one Hebrew edition, signifying the eminence of Latin language (4). William Osler described the *Canon* as a bible of medicine in his book *The Evolution of Modern Medicine* (5). Up to the 19th century Latin and Greek remained languages of medicine, in the following century, national therapeutic dialects began to pick up (6). Approximately, 90% of the English medical terminology originates from Latin or Greek (7). Without fundamental knowledge of Latin, understanding medical jargon in English language can be challenging.

Latin has been conventionally used in the sphere of pharmaceutical terminology. The European Pharmacopoeia, released in Latin in 1996, standardized

Latin as *lingua franca* for prescribing medication (8). A Prescription is a way of formal communication between physician and pharmacist. Since it is considered to be a lawful document, it may be utilized as *prima facie* (a Latin expression meaning first encounter or at first sight) evidence within the court of law (9) (10). The art of prescription writing developed in the ancient times and most of the complicated prescriptions were written in Latin, notably, it's being greatly replaced by English (7). However, in order to obviate inaccuracies in comprehending and dispensing prescriptions, various Latin abbreviations and words are still used universally so that prescriptions can be readily understood by pharmacists as well as physicians all around the globe.

Since the official names of the drugs and adjuvant substances are registered in the Latin language, a physician must build up a comprehensive pharmaceutical vocabulary, including grammatical structure of the prescription-related Latin text in order to prescribe pharmaceutical drugs.

Rx is the symbol usually seen on medical prescriptions. This symbol originates from Latin word 'recipe' meaning 'to take'. R along with x represents the eye of Horus, a symbol that was once used by the ancient Egyptians to denote healing. The symbol was also considered as a prayer to planet Jupiter (11). Prescription and pharmacy together are represented by this symbol. There aren't any generalized standards for writing a prescription, however, traditionally a prescription comprises of 2 main parts superscription that begins with symbol Rx, followed by name and strength of the drug and ends with *signa* meaning 'to write' under which detailed information is written in lay language e.g. how much of the drug is to be taken, frequency, duration, route, instructions and warnings.

Standardization Latin and Greek elements of words, permits naming of drugs which in turn allows the drug to obtain details about the mechanisms of action and chemical composition. Generally, pharmaceutical drugs are known to be available in several categories, and they are prescribed based on the diagnosis and treatment criteria of a patient. Nearly, 2/3rd of all prescriptions are dispensed as solid dosage forms. Certain popular dosage forms used are tablets (Tabella), Capsules (Capsulae), Powders (Pulvères) and they account for 50% of prescriptions. Semi solid dosage forms include ointment (Unguenta), liniment (Linimenta), Pastes (Pastae), Gel (Gelum), Cream (Cremor), Suppositories (suppositoria), rectum (rectal

suppository), vagina (vaginal suppository) or urethra (urethral suppository). Substances for external application such as Plaster (Emplastrum), Transdermal patch (Emplastrum transdermale). Liquid dosage forms comprise of, water (Aqua), ethyl alcohol (Spiritus aethylicus), glycerine (Glycerinum), vaseline oil, (Oleum Vaselini), olive oil. As a matter of fact all the dosage forms and abbreviations used in prescription writing are derived from Latin language (12).

Latin abbreviations have enabled the transfer of the majority of essential information using the minimum linguistic words (13). Some common abbreviations universally used (14);

Common abbreviations	Latin terms	Translation
aq	Aqua	Water
aa	Ana	of each
a.c.	ante cibium	before meals
a.d.	aurio dextra	right ear
b.i.d	bis in die	twice daily
bol.	Bolus	a large pill
cap., caps.	Capsula	Capsule
C	Cum	with
H.s	Hora somni	At bedtime
M.	Mane	In the morning

N.	Nocte	In the night
P.r.n.	Pro re nata	occasionally
Q.d.	Quarter die	Four times a day
Rep.	repetat	Let him repeat
Stat	Statim	Immediately
S.O.S	Si opus sit	As required
Syr.	Syrup	Syrup
tab	Tabella	Tablet
T.i.d	ter in die	Three times a day

**CONCLUSION**

Latin has been the language of science, medicine and pharmacology. Even though Latin is an unprogressive language its continued usage in the medical field has made it timeless. Latin continues to maintain its position firmly in the modern medicinal world. Latin terminologies are stable and tend to extend beyond national boundaries. The impact created by Latin on the development of English terminologies in the area of medicine and pharmacology is well appreciated. It is believed, physicians, clinical professionals, researchers and pharmacists would seize to function without the knowledge and understanding of Latin medical terminologies. Prescription writing would become next to impossible for physicians and would lead to errors in dispensing medications.

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