THE USE OF SHORTENING IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES. A PRACTICAL REVIEW FOR NURSES

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SUMMARY

Shortening as a word building process has become very productive in present day English. Abbreviations in nursing have also found a way for professional and quick communication. The main goals of this article, based on actual teaching-learning problems, is to provide some practical activities to give the learners opportunities to get acquainted with and practice abbreviations in an effective and communicative way, and to provide a glossary of the most frequently used abbreviations by nurses.

Subject headings: ABBREVIATIONS; COMMUNICATION; NURSES’ INSTRUCTIONS [PUBLICATION TYPE]

Shortening is considered a very productive word-building process. It is the dropping of the latter part of a word so as to produce a new and shorter word of the same meaning. The strain of modern life is obviously one of the reasons for this development. For example, almost all written material in hospital is written to be read at a glance because consultants read them before they do their rounds, and new nurses to acquaint with their patients. Similarly, the daily ward reports are read by the offgoing nurse in charge to the oncoming staff.¹

In English, shortenings may be present in written and spoken forms. Each of them has its own pattern, but as there is a constant exchange between both, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a given shortening was originated in one or in the other.

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An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase used for brevity especially in writing in place of the whole. Two possible types of correlation should be noted between the written and spoken forms:

1. If the abbreviation can be read as an ordinary English word, it will be read as one. For example,
   - UFO - Unidentified Flying Object
   - Polyps - Polymorphonuclear leucocytes
   - MSU - Mid Stream Urine
2. The other group consists of initial abbreviations with alphabetic reading retained. For example,
   - P.R - pupil reaction
   - B.P. - blood pressure
   - P. - pulse
The term abbreviation may also be used for a shortened form of a written word or phrase used in a text in place of the whole for brevity. For example,
   - Cas. - casualty
   - Elix. - elixir
   - Caps. - capsule

Not much has been written about abbreviations in English for Foreign Language Teaching and less in English for Specific Purpose (ESP), even though in the practice of nursing, this word-building process has found a field of development. High frequency use of abbreviations like:
   - ADL- Activities of Daily Living
   - a.c.- (Latin: ante cibum) before meals
   - b.i.d.- (Latin: bis in die) twice a day
   - h.s.- (Latin: hora somni) at bed time
   - n.r.- (Latin: non repetatur) do not repeat
   - p.c.- (Latin: post cibum) after meals
   - p.r.n.- (Latin: pro re nata) as needed
   - q. ____ h. –(Latin: quaque _____ hora) every ____ hours
   - q.o.d. every other day
   - t.i.d.- (Latin: ter in die) three times a day

for instance, are not present in any of the syllabus used at present in ESP courses in English subject for nursing learners. 2-4

Daily teaching has demonstrated that there is a handicap with the mastery of abbreviations. There is a lack of knowledge, which constitutes a language barrier. One of the problems for learners is that there is no correspondence between the English and the Spanish abbreviations as to initials. Therefore, the learner cannot make a transfer from their mother tongue to the target language. Another problem is that teachers of English tend to concentrate their teaching on oral practice, whereas,
writing has turned to be a neglected skill. Therefore, there is no teaching, and there is no practical activity to use abbreviations. Moreover, abbreviations are not an objective in the ESP syllabuses in Schools of Medical Sciences in Cuba, even though there are around fifty in the ESP textbooks used at present. Consequently, specialists need to study by themselves the majority of abbreviations, in order to be able to use them when working overseas in English speaking communities, because there is no enough bibliography for teachers of ESP to deepen in their use in the field of nursing.

This article sets out to provide practical activities in the teaching-learning process of abbreviations for nursing learners. These practical activities are task focused. They can first be done as a classroom activity and putting them into practice in training-on-the-job activities such as ward rounds, grand rounds, and shift-handover.

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

Puzzle
a. Find ten abbreviations

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b. What to they stand for?

KEY ANSWER

| Abd | - abdomen   | DAT | - diet as tolerated |
| GI  | - gastro-intestinal | ER  | - emergency room    |
| H   | - hour      | DOA | - dead on arrival   |
BP - blood pressure  dsg - dressing
cc - cubic centimeter  Dx - diagnosis
Hd - fluid  F - Fahrenheit
JUV - jugular vein distention  KUB - kidney, ureter, and bladder

EXERCISE 2

Puzzle

a. Find the abbreviation, which stands for:
   morning care patient  three times a day
   head injuries  casualty
   Electrocardiogram  every other day
   bed bath nothing by mouth  total nursing care

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EXERCISE 3

Choose a or b according to the information given:

1. The doctor said that the foetus was in breech presentation
   a. bp  b. BP
2. Nurses make emphasis on a careful
   a. a.m. care  b. AMC
3. The nurse replied that the patient had to be sent to the
   a. DR.  b. dr.
EXERCISE 4

Transcribe:
a. Some nursing notes are very brief, like the following example. Can you transcribe them?
Mr. J. Smith N/P # skull R.T.A. admitted via cas. 10: 30 p.m. Unconscious since admission. Head of bed raised. P, BP, PR reordered 1/2 hourly.
b. Some notes are not so brief. Fill in the gaps in these notes, not using abbreviations.
Mr. J. Smith’s diagnosis: fractured skull. Involved in a ________________
The patient was admitted via ________________ at ____________
And has been unconscious since admission. The head of his bed has been raised. His ______________, ______________ and ______________ have been recorded ______________ since admission.

KEY ANSWER

N/P - new patient  R.T.A. - road traffic accident
Pt - patient  P.R. - pupil reaction
Cas - casualty  # - fractured

EXERCISE 5

a. Abbreviate the underlined terms (teacher writes on board):
1. He was brought in with head injuries.
2. The doctor ordered an electrocardiogram.
3. She was given a stomach washout.
4. He was given a bed bath.
5. She will need total nursing care.
6. We have to get a mid-stream urine sample from John Smith this morning.

KEY ANSWER

HI, EKG or ECG, SW, BB, TNC, MSU.

EXERCISE 6

a. In the following sentences some of the words are abbreviated. Can you guess what they mean?
1. The nurse took the patient’s TPR every four hours.
2. The doctor did a lumbar puncture and the CSF was clear.
3. He was examined PR.
4. The patient could not PU and had to be catheterized.
5. Don’t give Mrs. Azukeli a drink – she’s NPO.
6. To be D/W doctor Schmidt

**KEY ANSWER**

TPR   temperature, pulse and respiration  
CSF   cerebral spinal fluid  
PR    pupil reaction  
PU    passed urine  
NPO   nothing by mouth  
D/W   discussed with

**EXERCISE 7**

a. Read the following nursing notes and discuss with a partner what they mean. Then write a full version, using complete sentences and no abbreviations.

T.N.C.   N.P.U. BP raised. PR unequal 8 p.m.. Doctor X informed. Seen by Doctor X 8:30 p.m.. For burr-holes 10 p.m.

**KEY ANSWER**

Total nursing care has been given. The patient has not passed urine since admission. At 8 p.m. his blood pressure was raised and the pupil reaction to light was unequal. Doctor X was informed. The patient was seen by Doctor X at 8.30 p.m. and is to have a burr-hole operation on his skull at 10:00 p.m.

**EXERCISE 8**

a. You are the off-going shift nurse. You are to present written shift handover report (use abbreviations when needed). You have only got five minutes to report on three cases.
b. Present the shift handover report to the other nurse who is coming on.
**GLOSSARY**

Commonly used abbreviations and meanings in nursing.

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C/o≠ complained of
C+S culture and sensitive
cancer
CA. carcinoma or cancer
catheter
CBC complete blood count
cc cubic centimeter (or cm´)
CC. chief complaint
ceph. floc. cephalin flocculation test
cl. chloride
cldy. cloudy
CNS Central Nervous System
CNS Centrl Nervous System
CO₂ Carbon dioxide
cont. continued
CPC Clinicopathological conference
CSF Cerebro spinal fluid
CVA cerebrovascular accident
CVP central venous pressure
cholesterol
cholesterol esters
D&C dilation & curettage
discussed with
dilation and curettage
diet as tolerated
discontinue (i.e., “DC Lasix.”)
discontinued (i.e., “Lasix DC´d.”)
diminished or decreased
Derm Dermatology
diagnosis
dilute
discharge
danger list
dead on arrival
diphtheria toxoid, pertussis vaccine, tetanus toxoid
dressing
diagnosis
estimated blood loss
electrocardiogram (EKG may be preferred for legibility)
ECT     electroconvulsive
ECHO virus enterocytopathogenic human orphan viruses
EDC     estimated date of confinement
EEG     electroencephalogram
elix.    elixir
ENT     ears, nose & throat or ear, nose & throat
EOM     extraocular movement
epith.   epithelium or epithelial
ER (ED) emergency room (department)
EST     electroshock therapy
expir.   expiration or expiratory
ext.     extract

F

# fracture
F. Fahrenheit (98.6 F)
fam.doc. family doctor (no longer accepted)
        family phys.
        family physician
        referring doctor
FBS     fasting blood sugar
Fe      iron

FETAL POSITION PRESENTATION
LFA (RFA) left frontoanterior (right)
LFP (RFP) left frontoposterior (right)
LFT (RFT) left frontotransverse (right)
LMA (RMA) left mentoanterior (right)
LMP (RMP) left mentoposterior (right)
LMT (RMT) left metrotransverse (right)
LOA     left occiput anterior
LOP     left occiput posterior
LOT     left occiput transverse
LSA (RSA) left sacrum anterior (right)
LSP (RSP) left sacrum posterior (right)
LST (RST) left sacrum transverse (right)
ROA     right occiput anterior
ROP     right occiput posterior
ROT     right occiput transverse
FH      family history
Fld     fluid
for. body foreign body
fract. fracture
FSH follicle stimulating hormone

G

gal. gallon
GI gastrointestinal
gm or g gram (measurement)
Gml grams per hundred milliliters of serum or blood as specified
gold.sol. colloidal gold curve
GPR glomerular filtration rate
gr. grain (measurement used in medicine)
Grav.I, Grav. II primigravida, secundigravida
indicating a woman of so many pregnancies.
Gtt drop (measurement used in medicine)
GU genitourinary
Gyn. gynecology

H

H hour
H&H hemoglobin & hematocrit
H.I. head injuries
h.s. hour of sleep, bed time
H.S. at bed time
H/O history of
HAA hepatitis associated antigen
Hct. hematocrit
Hgb hemoglobin
Hi. cal high calory
Hint. Hinton
Hi vit high vitamin
HOB head of bead
hpf. per high powered field (used only in describing urine sediments)
ht height

I

I$^{131}$ radioactive iodine
I&D incision and drainage (included because of general use)
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<td>LUQ</td>
<td>left upper quadrant</td>
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<td>LLL</td>
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LLQ  left lower quadrant
LLQ  left lower quadrant (abdomen)

M
m.  minun
M1  mitral first
MCH  mean corpuscular hemoglobin
MCHC  mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration
MCV  mean corpuscular volume
Mg.  magnesium
mg. %  milligrams per hundred milliliters of serum blood
Meq (Meq/1)  milliequivalents (per liter)
M. et N.  morning and night
Mn.  manganese
med.  medicine
mixt.  mixture
mg.  milligram
mid.  middle
min.  minute
ml.  milliliter
mm.  millimeter
mod.  moderate
mono  monocyte

N
Na.  sodium
NAD  nothing abnormal detected
N+V  nausea & vomiting
neg.  negative
neuro.  Neurology or neurological
no.  number
noc.  night
noct.  nocturnal
non. rep  do not repeat
NPN  nonprotein nitrogen
NPO  nothing by mouth
NS  neurosurgery
#, No.  number

O
O2  oxygen
o.d.  right eye

50
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<td>old tuberculin</td>
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**P**

- **p** after
- **p** pulse
- **P** phosphorus
- **P₂** pulmonic second heart sound
- **P₃₂** radioactive phosphorus
- **Para I, Para II** primipara, secundipara (indicating a woman of so many children)
- **paracent** paracentesis
- **PBI** protein bound iodine
- **p.c.** (Latin: post cibum) after meals
- **PE** physical examination
- **Peds.** Pediatrics

**PELVIC MEASUREMENTS:**

- **ant.** anterior
- **Post. Sag. D.** posterior sagittal diameter
- **A.P.D.** anteroposterior diameter
- **bisp.** bispinous or interspinous diameter
- **DC** diagonal conjugate
- **IT** intertubercous
- **OC** obstetrical conjugate
- **Tans. D.** transverse diameter
- **percuss. & AUSC. &** percussion and auscultation. “P & A” is disparaged
- **p.r.** per rectum
- **p.r.n.** (Latin: pro re nata) as often as necessary
\( p_e \) hydrogen ion concentration
per through or by
peri. care perineal care
PERRLA pupils equal, round reactive to light and accommodation
PH Past History
Phys. Th. Physical Therapy
PI present illness
pk. dissociation constant
PKU phenylkeronuria
PM afternoon, evening (after 12 noon)
PMI point of maximal impulse
po (Latin: per os) by mouth
polyps. polymorphonuclear leucocytes
POMR patient oriented medical record
Pop. smear Papanicolaus smear test
poplit. popliteal
Post op postoperative
Pre op preoperative
prep. prepare for
prn when necessary (total protein is preferred when referring to a clinical determination of the protein of the blood.)
prothr. cont. prothrombin content
prothr. time. prothrombin time
PSP phenosulfonphthallein
psych psychological
PT physical therapy
pt. patient
pulv. powder
PZI protamine zinc insulin

\( Q \)
q every
q.s quantity sufficient
q.d. every day
q.h. every hour
q.i.d. every other day
q.o.d. every other day
qt. quart
q2h. (Latin: quaque duo hora) every two hours
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>q3h</td>
<td>(Latin: quaque tres horas) every three hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q4h</td>
<td>(Latin: quaque quatuor hora) every four hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q.(4) i.d</td>
<td>(Latin: quatuor in die) four times a day</td>
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<tr>
<td>q.n.</td>
<td>(Latin: quaque nocte) every night</td>
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<tr>
<td>q.n.s.</td>
<td>(Latin: quantume non statis) quantity not sufficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>quant.</td>
<td>quantitative or quantity</td>
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<tr>
<td>R/rt.</td>
<td>right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r/resp.</td>
<td>respiration</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBC</td>
<td>red blood cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>rbc.</td>
<td>red blood cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rh</td>
<td>Rhesus blood factor</td>
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<tr>
<td>RLQ</td>
<td>right lower quadrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLL</td>
<td>right lower lobe (lung)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RML</td>
<td>right middle lobe (lung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRE</td>
<td>round, regular and equal</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUL</td>
<td>right upper lobe (lung)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUQ</td>
<td>right upper quadrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUQ</td>
<td>right upper quadrant (abdomen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rx.</td>
<td>therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.O.S</td>
<td>(Latin: si opus sit) may be repeated once if urgently required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.s.</td>
<td>enema, soapsuds enema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sang.</td>
<td>sanguineous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sat.</td>
<td>saturated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sed. rate</td>
<td>erythrocyte sedimentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGOT</td>
<td>serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGPT</td>
<td>serum glutamic oxalacetic transaminase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>Social History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sig.</td>
<td>Label or write on label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOB</td>
<td>short of breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol.</td>
<td>solution (s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ss.</td>
<td>one half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sp.gr.</td>
<td>specific gravity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>system review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spec.</td>
<td>specimen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ (SC)</td>
<td>subcutaneous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ss | one half  
Staph | staphilococcus  
stat | (Latin: statim) immediately and once only  
stillb | stillborn or still birth  
strep. | streptococcus  
STS | serologic list for syphilis  
Subcut. or | subcutaneous  
subs. |  
subling | under the tongue, sublingual  
Surg. or | Surgery or surgical  
surg. |  
SW | stomach washout  
Sx | symptoms  
sympat. | sympathetic  
sympt. | Symptom  
syr. | syrup  

**T**

| t.i.d | three times a day  
| tab. | tablet  
| tap. | teaspoon  
| tbc. | tuberculosis  
| tbsp. | tablespoon  
| tint. or tr. | tincture  
| TLC | tender loving care  
| TPR | temperature, pulse & respiration  
| TSH | thyroid stimulating hormone  
| Tx | treatment  

**U**

| U | unit  
| U/A | urine analysis  
| ung. | ointment  
| URI | upper respiratory infection (included because of general use)  
| Urol. or rural | Urology or urological  
| UTI | urinary tract infection  

**V**

| vag. | vaginal  
| VC or Vit | vital capacity  
| VD | venereal disease  
| VDRL (test) | venereal disease research laboratory test  

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RESUMEN

El uso de abreviaturas como proceso de construcción de palabras se ha vuelto muy productivo en el Inglés actual. Las abreviaciones también han encontrado un camino para la comunicación profesional y rápida. Los principales objetivos de este artículo, son proporcionar algunas oportunidades prácticas para brindar a los que aprenden oportunidades de familiarizarse y practicar abreviaturas de una forma eficaz y comunicativa, y proporcionar un glosario de las abreviaturas utilizadas más frecuentemente por las enfermeras.

DeCS: ABREVIATURAS; COMUNICACION; INSTRUCCION PARA ENFERMERAS

REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS
