

Medical Terminology

Have you ever read something on Sjögren's Syndrome or been at your hospital appointment and not completely understood all of the words and terms used? Well we're here to help! We've tried to define some of the common terms you might come across, so you'll be in the know from now on! If there are things we have missed out please let us know.

NHS Terms

Primary Care: This is the care that takes place outside of a hospital, in the community. A wide variety of health professionals are involved in this, including your GP, nurses, physiotherapists and dentists. The majority of care occurs in primary care and it aims to give continuity of care over time.

Secondary Care: This is care that is usually provided in a hospital setting and is of a more specialised nature, with skills, support and equipment specific to a hospital environment and team. You will either be referred to it by your GP or admitted as an emergency following an injury or sudden illness.

Social Care: This includes all of the services that support people in their everyday lives. These services are either funded by the local authorities or are paid for by the individual themselves. Home care, day centres, residential and nursing homes and supported entry into work are just a few examples of the practical help that social care offers.

Primary Care Trusts (PCTs): The country is split into many PCTs and they are the local NHS organisations, which assess the healthcare needs of the area they cover. They then plan and secure the right services to meet these needs.

Health Care Professionals

This list only covers a selection of the health professionals, which are crucial for your care.

Chiropractor: These professionals assess, treat and try to prevent musculoskeletal problems and their effects on other body systems. They often use manual treatments, for example spinal manipulation.

Clinical radiologist: this doctor looks at images taken of the body; this can be by simple x-rays or by more complex methods such as MRI and CT scans. The images taken are used to diagnose a variety of conditions. The clinical radiologist also performs procedures using the imaging techniques to guide them.

Haematologist: This is a doctor who looks at blood, the organs that make blood and blood diseases. They help to diagnose and treat these conditions.

Immunologist: an immunologist is a specialised doctor whose area of interest is the immune system. This is the system which defends your body from disease. There are many ways this can go wrong one, including autoimmune diseases. An immunologist will help to diagnose and treat these conditions.

Occupational therapist: These professionals help rehabilitate people and aid them in purposeful activities. This includes methods and gadgets for getting dressed, cooking, having a bath etc. This is essential to promote a person's health and independence.

Orthopaedic surgeon: This doctor is specially trained to treat and diagnose musculoskeletal conditions, which are conditions which affect bones, joints and soft tissues. They mostly treat their patients with major and minor operations. They are usually based in hospital trauma and orthopaedic units.

Osteopath: This professional also treats and prevents musculoskeletal conditions, but they do this without drugs or surgery. Instead they treat conditions by mobilising and manipulation.

Phlebotomist: This person is trained to take blood samples from patients

Physiotherapist: These professionals help to treat physical problems caused by a variety of factors, including accident, ageing, disease, disability. The techniques they use are generally physical, for example gentle exercise.

Radiographer: this is a professional who takes images of a patient, using a variety of techniques. These images help diagnose the conditions (see clinical radiologist).

Rheumatologist: this is a specialised doctor who is trained in diagnosing and treating rheumatic diseases, including arthritis and Sjögren's Syndrome. Rheumatic conditions can cause general illness as well as affecting bones and joints. Rheumatologists will organise a treatment plan for your condition and monitor you regularly.

Social Worker: This professional will talk to patients and families to assess their needs, physical, mental and emotional. They will then aim to find the appropriate support and care.

Medical Terms

Antibodies: An antibody is a minute Y shaped protein. Millions of these are produced by the immune system to fight infection and they circulate in the blood stream where they find and remove foreign objects such as viruses and bacteria. (See ro and Ia).

Anti-nuclear antibodies: These are antibodies, found in the blood, and they are associated with Sjögren's Syndrome, Lupus and other diseases, but are also occasionally found in otherwise normal people.

Auto-antibodies: These are antibodies which react with your own body's tissues.

Autoimmune disease: This is a group of disorders which affect your own immune system; they cause antibodies to attack the body's own tissues.

Biopsy: A biopsy is a test used by medical professionals and involves the removal of a sample cells or tissues from the body. These are then examined to help in diagnosis.

Blepharitis: This is inflammation of the edge of the eyelids.

Conjunctiva: The conjunctiva is a membrane that covers the white part of the eye (the Sclera sclera) and lines the inside of the eyelids. It helps to lubricate the eye by producing a small volume of mucus and tears.

Connective tissue diseases: this is a historical term often used to describe the group of rheumatic diseases such as Sjögren's Syndrome, lupus, scleroderma and some others.

Cornea: This is the transparent part of the eye that covers the front of the eye. It helps to focus images.

CT scan: This stands for a computer tomography scan and is sometimes known as a CAT scan (computed axial tomography). This is a technique used to take pictures/images of the body. It uses many cameras to take 3-D images. They show much more detail than a simple x-ray and can help in diagnoses of conditions.

La: This is a type of autoantibody found in Sjögren's Syndrome, some patients with lupus and occasionally in healthy individuals and they are found in up to 60% of patients (see antibody and ro).

Lacrimal/lachrymal glands: These are a pair of glands, one for each eye, that secrete a watery layer of the tear film

MRI scan: This stands for magnetic resonance imaging. This is another technique used to take pictures of the inside of the body.

Raynaud's phenomenon: This condition is associated with Sjögren's Syndrome and other connective tissue disorders and 50% of patients will get it. The blood flow to the hands and feet is affected and causes severe coldness and colour changes. There are primary and secondary types of Raynaud's; the former being symptoms in an otherwise healthy person and the latter being symptoms in association with another disease, for example Sjögren's Syndrome.

Rheumatoid factor (RF): This is a blood test that is often conducted on patients who you think have rheumatoid arthritis. It is present in a variety of rheumatological conditions, including some patients with Sjögren's Syndrome.

Ro: This is another of the auto-antibodies which are specific to Sjögren's Syndrome and are found in up to 60% of patients (see antibody and la).

Schirmer test: This is a test used in the diagnosis of Sjögren's Syndrome. It tests tear flow. Pieces of filter paper are hooked over the lids and the patient then closes their eyes for five minutes. The paper should absorb your tears, when there is reduced wetting it suggests a dry eye.

Sialogram: This is a special x-ray, where a radio-opaque dye is injected into the ducts of the salivary gland. The x-ray then shows all of the ducts clearly and any blockages can be seen.

Sicca syndrome: This describes the dryness of the eyes and/or mouth in Sjögren's Syndrome but it also covers people with other causes of dryness such as medication, radiotherapy, certain viruses, older age or unexplained

Systemic disease: This is a condition which affects more than one system of the body. For example, Sjögren's Syndrome, which can affect the whole body.

Xerophthalmia: This is a term meaning dry eyes.

Xerostomia: This is a term that means dry mouth.